CHAPTER-1

INTRODUCTION

The concept of Local Self- Government emerges from man's basic urge for liberty, the power to make decisions and to uplift the society as per the needs of the respective communities.[1] Local Self- Governments are those bodies that look after the administration of an area or a small community such as a village, a town or a city.[2] Local Self-Government operates at the lowest level of society. It works at the grass-root level, close to the people, touching their everyday life. Local Self-Government is the management of local affairs by such local bodies who have been elected by the local people. These local bodies provide services to the local community as well as acts as an instrument of democratic self government. Local Self- Government is a form of government that has no share in sovereignty and is thus entirely subordinate to central authority or, in a federal system, to state or regional authority.[3] This level of government is recognised by the people as they are close to the citizen and involve them in the decision making process.

The jurisdiction of a Local Government is limited to a specific area, a village or a city, and its functions relate to the provision of civic amenities to the population living within that area. According to V.V. Rao, Local Government is "that part of the government which deals mainly with local affairs, administered by authorities subordinate to the state government but elected independently of the state authority by the qualified residents". In simple language it may be said that a Local Government is a statutory authority in a specified local area having the power to raise revenue through taxes for the performance of local services like sanitation, education, water supply, etc. It is constituted by elected representatives

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[1] Dhamala R. R, "*A Study of Local-Government and Democratic Decentralization in Sikkim*", (PhD Thesis), Department of Political Science, North Bengal University, 1985, p-5

[2] http://www.mapsofindia.com/Punjab/government_and politics/Panchayats.html

[3] Heywood Andrew, "*Key Concepts in Politics*", Macmillan Press Ltd, London, 2000, p249

of the local people and enjoys considerable autonomy from state or central control sufficient to enable it to perform its services adequately.[4]

There are certain characteristics on which the system of Local Government is based. Some of its important characteristics are:

(a) Local Area: - Local Government unit, as far as its jurisdiction is concerned, has a well defined area which is fixed by the concerned state government. This area can be termed as a city, a town or a village,

(b) Local Authority: - The administration of a particular locality is run by an authority or by a body of persons who are elected directly by the people residing in that particular area. The authority which includes the elected representatives of the people is responsible for management of local affairs in that area,

(c) Civic Amenities for Local Inhabitants: - The primary objective of Local Government is to provide certain civic amenities to the people at their door-steps. The provision of these civic amenities ensures the healthy living of local community,

(d) Local Autonomy: - Local autonomy means the freedom of the Local Government to decide and act in the sphere of activities and functions allotted to them by the statutes under which they are created,

(e) Local Accountability: - Local Government units which are created to provide civic amenities to the people are accountable to the local people. The people of a local area keep a watch on local authorities to ensure effective performance of their functions,

(f) Local Finance: - In order to perform its functions effectively, it is necessary that every local government unit is provided with adequate finances. The services provided to the local inhabitants are largely financed out of finance raised locally. The local inhabitants are required to pay taxes imposed by the concerned local

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[4] Sharma Monoj, "*Local Government: Rural and Urban*", Anmol Publications, New Delhi, 2004, pp1-3

authority. The Central Government and State Government also render them financial aid through a system of grants-in-aid and permission to raise loans to enable them to perform the tasks assigned to them,

(g) Local Participation: - The success or failure of developmental plans at the local level depends upon the active participation of local people for whom these plans are made. If the goals of development have to be achieved, people's participation is a prerequisite for it,

(h)Local Leadership: - The people who come under the purview of Local Government, especially those living in rural areas, are generally inexperienced and unaware about the functioning of local bodies, strong leadership, therefore, needs to be provided to those people, this leadership is provided to the people from the local area in the shape of elected representatives and,

(i) Local Development: - Local Government is concerned with the overall development of the people living within its area. Every activity of Local Government is aimed at local development.[5]

The practice of Local Self-Government embraces a number of concepts viz., 'Delegation', 'Devolution', 'Deconcentration' and 'Decentralisation'.

Delegation- The central idea of delegation is the transfer of power, authority and responsibility to someone. It is the transfer of certain functions to sub-national levels to be performed on an agency basis. It refers to relation where powers are formally conferred under law, as by the constitution itself or by the legislative body to an executive agency or by an administrator to a subordinate, and from one level of government to another.[6]

Devolution- Devolution is the transfer of power from central government to sub-ordinate regional institutions.[7]It means grant of power by an upper level of government to a lower one. In contrast to federalism, where each tier has

[5] Ibid, pp4-6

[6] Decentralization- http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/decentralization

[7] Heywood Andrew, "*Key Concepts in Politics*", Macmillan Press Ltd, London, 2000, p238

protected areas of power, a devolved government remains constitutionally sub-ordinate to the government which gave it its power. Devolution involves the transfer of functions, resources and power to sub-national levels of government whereby sub-national governments assume full responsibility and public accountability for decentralised functions.[8]

Deconcentration- Deconcentration occurs when central government disperses its officials to sub-national levels to carry out regular functions under the authority of central government. There is no transfer of power to sub-national levels of government. It can merely shift responsibilities from central government officials in the capital city to those working in regions, provinces or districts, or it can create strong field administration or local administrative capacity under the supervision of central government ministries.[9]

Decentralisation- Decentralisation is usually understood to the expansion of local autonomy through the transfer of powers and responsibilities away from national bodies.[10]Decentralisation is defined as the delegation and devolution of functions, resources and authority from central government to regional councils and local authorities. It means the devolution of power and competence to independent governments below central government level. Decentralisation is a process of sharing of part of the governmental power by a central ruling group with other groups, each having authority within a specified area of the state. The scope of decentralisation includes sub-divisions of the state's territory into smaller areas and creation of political and administrative institutions in those areas.[11]

The process of decentralisation involves a power shift i.e., role, authority and responsibility in the direction (a) from centre to state, (b) from state to districts downwards to the units of local self –government leading ultimately to peoples participation in self management, and c) a horizontal power shift from appointed

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[8] Mclean Iain and McMillan Alistair, "*Concise Dictionary of Politics*", OUP, 2009, pp 149-150.
[9] http://www.cifor.org/publication/pdf_files/Interlaken/compilation.pdf
[10] Heywood Andrew, op.cit p237
[11] Dubey A K, "*Decentralization: Role of State in the Context of Development*", in S N Mishra, A D Mishra and Sweta Mishra(Ed), **Public Governance and Decentralization**, Mital Publications, New Delhi, 2003, pp669-670.

executives to the elected representatives of people. Decentralisation enables full involvement of the people of grassroots in the process of decision making, planning and implementation for the development of their area.[12]

Democratic Decentralisation

A democratic polity involves the decentralization of power through which that the affairs of the local people are managed by means of their positive participation. It implies the extension of democracy at the grassroots level. It signifies marked devolution of power from the higher to the lower levels in a way that the units of Local Government exercise their authority with the participation of the people of that area with occasional control and supervision of the provincial and central governments.[13]Democratic decentralisation is that process of decentralisation which conforms to the basic tenets of democracy. It implies a council of elected representatives at the decentralised level of administration which would be accountable to its electorate. Elections to these councils may be direct or indirect. Democratic decentralisation seeks to widen the areas of people's participation, authority and autonomy through dispersal of powers. It is the very base of the development of the people at the grass roots level. Democratic decentralisation offers opportunities to the people at grassroots level to participate in decision making.[14]

The concept of democratic decentralisation is intimately associated with the idea of Local Self- Government. Democratic decentralisation is a political ideal and Local Self Government is its institutional form. The institution of Local Self-Government includes both rural and urban local bodies. In India, the Panchayati Raj Institutions (Rural) and the Municipal bodies (Urban) provide institutional frameworks for democratic decentralisation. The Constitution provides a clear mandate for democratic decentralisation not only through the Directive Principles

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[12] Ibid p-588

[13] Johari J C, "*Indian Government and Politics*", Vol-II, Shoban Lal and Co. Jalanddhar, 2003,pp515-516

[14] Dubey A K, "*Decentralization: Role of State in the Context of Development*", in S N Mishra, A D Mishra and Sweta Mishra(Ed), **Public Governance and Decentralization**, Mital Publications, New Delhi, 2003, pp670-672.

of State Policy which exhorts the State to promote Panchayati Raj Institutions but more specifically now through the 73rd and 74th Amendments of the Constitution.

The 73rd and the 74th Constitutional Amendment Acts, 1992 enjoin upon the states to establish a three-tier system of Panchayats at the village, intermediate and district levels and Municipalities in the urban areas respectively. States are expected to devolve adequate powers, responsibilities and finances upon these bodies so as to enable them to prepare plans and implement schemes for economic development and social justice. These Acts provide a basic framework of decentralisation of powers and authorities to the Panchayati Raj/Municipal bodies at different levels. However, responsibility for giving it a practical shape rests with the States. States are expected to act in accordance with the spirit of the Acts for establishing a strong and viable system of Local Self-Government. The 73rd and 74th Amendments to the Constitution of India constitute a new chapter in the process of democratic decentralisation in India. In terms of these Amendments, the responsibility for taking decisions regarding activities at the grass-root level which affect people's lives directly would rest upon the elected members of the people themselves. By making regular elections to Panchayati Raj/Municipal bodies mandatory, these institutions have been given their due place in the democratic set-up of our country.

Local Self- Governments in India, both Rural and Urban, has seen many ups and downs. But after the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments, 1992, Local Self Government in India got a new life, as it is enshrined in the Constitution of India like the two upper levels of governments i.e., Central and State Governments. Local Self-Government is the third stratum of Government, the first two being the Central and the State Governments.[15] Presently, Rural Self Government i.e., Panchayati Raj system is working in accordance with the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act and Urban Self Government i.e., Municipal Bodies is working in accordance with the 74th Constitutional Amendment Act.

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[15] Maheswari S R, "*Local Government in India*", Laxmi Narain Agarwal, Agra, 2003, pp3-5

Following the enactment of the 73rd Amendment Act, 1992, almost all the States in India passed legislation in conformity with the provisions of the 73rd Amendment Act. There are some States which have two tier Panchayats – one at the village level and second at the district level. And there are also other States where Panchayati Raj Institution is a three tier system- Gram/ Gaon Panchayat as first level, Samiti, Mandal or Anchalik or Taluk or Block or Janapad or Union or Kshetra as second level and Zilla or District as the third level. At the rural level the *Gaon Sabha* constitutes the foundation of the Panchayati Raj system. *Gaon Sabha* performs the functions and powers entrusted to it by the state legislatures. The 73rd Amendment Act aims to provide three tier system in the Local Self Government constituted through elections held regularly every five years. The Act also provides reservation of seats for Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and Women. Moreover, the Act provides for a State Finance Commission to make recommendations regarding the financial powers of the Panchayats and to constitute District Planning Committee to prepare draft development plan for the district. [16] Provision has also been made to constitute a State Election Commission in every state to supervise, direct and control the regular and smooth elections to Panchayat bodies.

The 74th Constitutional Amendment Act, 1992, proposes to constitute a uniform structure of Municipal Corporations, Municipal Councils and Nagar Panchayats in transitional areas. This Act granted the Urban Local Government a constitutional status. Presently, the Urban Local Government has three categories-(a) Nagar Panchayat for a transitional area, i.e., an area in transition from a rural to an urban area, (b) Municipal Council for smaller urban area and (c) Municipal Corporation for a large urban area. An area is designated as 'a transitional area' or a smaller urban area' or 'a larger urban area' on the basis of size and density of population of that area, the revenue generated for local administration, the percentage of employment in non-agricultural activities, the economic importance or such other factors. The Governor of a state can provide, by a notification that a Municipality may not be created in an industrial township

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[16] Ibid, pp3-7

if the municipal services are provided by an industrial establishment. Another type of town which does not come within the scope of above categories is the army cantonment. If any towns have come up around the army stations, the management boards for these towns are established and these are controlled by the Defence Department. These are known as Cantonment Boards. The seats in the Municipalities are filled by persons who are elected directly by the people from the territorial constituencies within the municipal area. These territorial constituencies are known as wards.[17]

Local Self- Government in Assam

In order to incorporate the changes made by the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendment Acts, Government of Assam passed the 'Assam Panchayat Act, 1994' and also brought some modifications in 'Assam Municipal Act, 1956' titled as 'Assam Municipal (Amendment) Act, 1994'.[18] The Assam Panchayat Act, 1994 has retained the three tier system. These institutions are (a) Gaon Panchayat at the village level, (b) Anchalik Panchayat at the block level and, (c) Zilla Parishad at the district level. As compared to the earlier Panchayat system this Act brought forward important changes, viz. constitution of Gaon Sabha, District Planning Committee, Finance Commission, and State Panchayat Election Commission etc. The Act extends over the rural areas of Assam, except the autonomous districts under the 6th Schedule of the Constitution of India and the Autonomous Councils created under the State Legislation. It also excluded any area which is included in a Municipality or a Town Committee or a Cantonment or a Municipal Corporation. For the welfare of the Schedule Castes, Scheduled Tribes and Women adequate provisions have been made in Local Self-Government institutions through reservation of seats in different local bodies.[19] The Assam Municipal Act provides for three types of urban self-government (a) Municipal Corporation for urban area where population is more than one lakh ,

[17] Ibid, pp3-8

[18] Tripathi A K , "*The Assam Municipal Act, 1956*", Regional law House, Guwahati, 2008p257-258

[19] Barman N. C, "*Assam Panchayat Act 1994*", Assam Law House, Guwahati, 1994pp12-60

(b) Municipal Board in an area where population is more than ten thousand and less than one lakh and (c) Town Committee in an area where population is less than ten thousand. In addition to Panchayati Raj and Municipal System there are Autonomous Councils under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution and Autonomous Councils under the State Legislation.

Provisions for Women in the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendment Acts

The 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendment Acts are the landmarks in the history of women's development in India as these Acts are revolutionary steps towards women's participation in decision making and in the political process of our country. In order to ensure empowerment of women in political arena the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendment Acts provided 33% reservation of seats for women in all Rural and Urban local elected bodies. The Constitutional 73rd Amendment Act, Article 243-D (3) provides that not less than one-third of the total number of seats to be filled by direct election in every Panchayat shall be reserved for women and such seats may be allotted by rotation to different constituencies in a Panchayat. Article 243-D(4) provides that the offices of the Chairpersons in the Panchayats at the village or any other level shall also be reserved for women and such reservation shall not be less than one third of their total number of offices of the Chairperson in the Panchayats . The Constitutional 74th Amendment Act, Article 243-T (3) provides that not less than one-third of the total number of seats to be filled by direct election in every Municipality shall be reserved for women and such seats may be allotted by rotation to different constituencies in a Municipality. Article 243-T (4) provides that the offices of the Chairpersons in the Municipalities shall also be reserved for women and such reservation shall not be less than one third of their total number of offices of the Chairpersons in the Municipalities.[20]

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[20] Shukla V. N, revised by Mahendre P. Singh , " *The Constitution of India*", Eastern Book Company, Luknow, 2001, pp614-621.

Conceptual Framework

Political Participation and Empowerment

Political participation is the hallmark of a democratic set-up. Nature, success and effectiveness of a democracy largely depend upon the extent to which equal, effective and actual participation is provided by the system to all its citizens.[21] A society in principle is a participant society in which power is shared and authoritative decisions concerning the society are made by the representatives of the citizens. Citizen's active participation in political affairs in a democracy is necessary because it assures the legitimacy of the system and also strengthens the democratic system. Political participation is a criterion for political development. Generally speaking, political participation is the involvement of individuals and groups in the political process of a political system at various levels.[22]

Participation means that people are closely involved in the economic, social, cultural and political processes that affect their lives. People may, in some cases, have complete and direct control over these processes- in other cases; the control may be partial or indirect. The important thing is that people have constant access to decision-making and power. Participation is an overall development strategy-focusing on the central role that people should play in all spheres of life.[23] People can participate as individuals or as groups. Participation is a process, not an event.

Since participation requires increased influence and control, it also demands increased empowerment- in economic, social and political terms. In economic terms, participation means being able to engage freely in any activity. In social terms, participation means being able to join fully in all forms of community life, without regard to religion, colour, sex, or race. And in political terms, participation means the freedom to choose and change governance at every level;

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[21] Bhawana Jharta, "*Women and Politics in India*", Deep and Deep Publications, New Delhi, 1998, pp1-3

[22] Singla Pamela, "*Womens' Participation in Panchayati Raj Institutions, Nature and Effectiveness*", Rawat Publications, New Delhi, 2007, pp63-84

[23] Ibid, pp65-84

from the presidential palace to the village council. All these forms of participation are intimately linked. Without one, the others will be incomplete and less effective. By participation we mean a process through which human beings will realize their full potentials in all areas of life.[24]

The concept of political participation includes activities like voting, campaigning in elections, convincing other persons to vote in a particular way, attending public meetings, distributing party literature, joining an organization or a party, contributing money to a party, contesting elections and holding public or party office, etc. These are called conventional political activities. But recently, the concept of participation has been broadened to include all those political acts through which people directly affect political decision making process. Besides conventional activities, participation now also includes such activities like petitioning, participation in mass movements, agitations, strikes, demonstrations, protests, marches, presenting memorandums and violent acts designed to change political system.[25]

Empowerment is a process which enables individual or a group of individuals to realize their full identity and powers in all spheres of life. It means being free to explore the best way of doing things, not just doing what you are told. It means 'giving power to' and 'creating power within'. It is a process that people undergo, which eventually leads to changes. It refers to passing on authority and responsibility. It occurs when someone who did not have power earlier is given power. In other words; it refers to giving power to individuals in all spheres of life which are essential for survival and overall development of mankind.[26]

Empowerment essentially means decentralization of authority and power. It aims at getting participation of deprived section of people in decision making process. Empowerment is the process by which the powerless people can change their

[24] Rehman Kanta and Rehman M M, "*Participation for Development*", Manak Publications, New Delhi,1998, pp8-10

[25] Bhawana Jharta, "*Women and Politics in India*", Deep and Deep Publications, New Delhi, 1998, pp11-12

[26] Mishra Sweta, "*Empowerment of Women in Urban Local Bodies: An Assessment*", Nagarlok, October- December, 2002, pp35-37

circumstances and begin to have control over their lives. It includes both control over resources (physical, human, intellectual and financial) and over ideology (beliefs, values and attitudes). It means not only greater extrinsic control, but also a growing intrinsic capability- greater self-confidence and an inner transformation of one's consciousness that enables one to overcome external barriers to accessing resources of changing traditional ideology.[27] Empowerment is a way of making the disadvantaged group of people aware of their rights as it plays a vital role in social, economic and political decision making process.[28]

Empowerment is related to the concept of power though the term power may have different connotations. In absolute sense, it implies control over the mind and actions of others. In the subjective realm, it means power to do anything without being subjugated to any other forces, to be able to decide for oneself and also become an active participant in the decision making process. Power can also be understood as having the capacity to mobilize resources to accomplish desired end. Empowerment is basically related to the location of power in society and also to the fact that women lack this power in that it underlines the dominant-subordinate framework of the society. If power is understood within the framework of dominant and subordinate continuum with the women occupying the latter category, empowerment implies a mere share in the power which does not affect the dominated/subordinated status quo. Moreover, this kind of rearrangement only changes the power equations and thereby leading to the growth of new marginalized section in the society. Hence, women have to be empowered in a way, which is radically different from the existing power structure.[29]

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[27] Ghosh Dilip Kumar and Jha Bhawana, *"Political Empowerment of Women",* in Anil Kumar Thakur and Dilip Kumar(Ed), **Gender Empowerment and Development**, Deep and Deep Publications, New Delhi, 2008, p442

[28] Kumar Hajira and Varghese Jaimon, "*Women's Empowerment: Issues, Challenges and Strategies*", Regenly Publications, New Delhi, 2005, p-207-208

[29] Dhamala R. R, *"Reflections on the Empowerment of Women",* in Rathindra Nath Pramanik, Ashim kumar Adhikary(Ed), **Gender Inequality and Women's Empowerment**, Abhijeet Publications, Delhi, 2006, pp1-3

In order to evaluate empowerment it is important to locate the source of empowerment. Empowerment may emerge either from within or from without. When the idea of empowerment flows from government decisions, as is the case in India it becomes superimposed and attainment of goal remains partial. But when it emerges from within i.e. when the women themselves feel the need for recasting their position, which is not related to the power equation in society it leads to the development of self-reliant women, which, in fact is the essence of empowerment.[30]

Women Participation and Women Empowerment

Women, who constitute half of the human population, have been denied their due share in politics not only in India but also in the whole world. It is very surprising that even developed western countries do not have proper representation of women in politics. Discrimination on gender basis is a worldwide phenomenon. Women are treated as weaker sex in all societies. Legally, most modern democratic constitutions of the world including that of India have established the equality of men and women in matters of political rights, but in practice their participation in active politics does not appear to be very encouraging. [31]

As women comprise about half of the population, this segment of society cannot be ignored but requires a special attention. We have to know the nature of their participation. Without which we would not be in a position to have a true eye upon democratic participation and to frame right policies and strategies. A democracy will fail in its objective if a vast number of citizens i.e., women lack equal opportunity to participate in the governmental decision-making process. They are equal partner in the nation building and political development. The 73rd and 74th Amendments to the Constitution of India are really encouraging and praiseworthy efforts of the Government of India to provide opportunities to

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[30] Ibid, pp1-3

[31] Jharta Bhawana, "*Women and Politics in India*", Deep and Deep Publications, New Delhi, 1998, pp2-3

women to take part in the political and developmental affairs at local level, which is the very foundation of the democratic structure of the country.[32]

Women empowerment refers to the process of strengthening the hands of women who have been suffering from various disabilities, inequalities and gender discrimination. It is a process in which women gain control over their own lives by knowing and claiming their rights at all levels of society, viz., international, national, local and household. It is nothing but a religious, cultural and legal struggle against oppression, injustice and discrimination. In short, it is the ability to organize and mobilize for change and enable the individual group to direct their own life and reach a stage where they are more likely to succeed in whatever they attempt to do. It is an ongoing process and not an end by itself.[33]The focus of women empowerment is equipping women to be economically independent, self- reliant, have a positive self-esteem to enable them to face any difficult situation and they should be able to participate in the process of decision making.[34]

According to country report of Government of India presented at Fourth World Conference of Women at Beijing in 1995, "Empowerment means working from a portion of enforced powerlessness to one of power. It would promote women's inherent strength and positive self- image". According to Beteille (1999), "Empowerment is a way of addressing the problem of rights that remain unenforced".[35] Promila Kapur views empowerment as "a process in which women gain greater share of control over resources material, human and intellectual like knowledge , information, ideas, financial resources like money

[32] Kumar Hajira and Varghese Jaimon, "*Women's Empowerment: Issues, Challenges and Strategies*", Regency Publications, New Delhi, 2005, p-207-208

[33] Ibid.

[34] Fadia B. L, "*Indian Government and Politics*", Sahitya Bhawan Publications, Agra, 2004, p-928

[35] Chaudhuri Maitreyi, "*Empowerment of Women through Panchayati Raj Institutions*", in Asha Mukherjee and Kumkum Bhattacharjee(Ed), **Conditioning and Empowerment of Women**, Gyan Publishing House, New Delhi, 2003, pp225-231

and access to money and control over decision in the home, community, society and nation, and to gain power".[36]

Women empowerment as a phenomenon is not something absolutely new. It has been there throughout history in almost all societies. What could be considered as new is its increasingly coming out in public; it's having been shifted and reshaped from women's welfare to their development to women's empowerment.[37] The first ever world conference on women was held in Mexico in 1975 to address the issue of gender inequality. Due to the efforts of the UNO, the issue of empowerment of women became an international issue. The UN declared the year 1975 as the International Women's Year .The UN Declaration of 1975 compelled the national governments to shift their emphasis on women's programmes from welfare to development. The declaration prescribed for the all round development of women. It was followed by a second World Conference on women at Copenhagen in 1980 and a third World Conference on women in Nairobi, 1985. The fourth World Conference on women was held in Beijing, 1995. The Conference unanimously passed a resolution on "gender equality".[38]

Five Year Plans and development of Women in India

In India the development of women has always been the central focus in the developmental planning. After independence there have been various shifts in the policy approaches from the concept of welfare in 1970s, to development in 1980s, and empowerment in 1990s. Ninth Plan (1997-2002) emphasised that Empowerment of Women is the agents of social change and development.[39] India has heralded the new millennium by pronouncing the year 2001 as Women's Empowerment year. In order to address the concerns of women in society, the Government of India adopted a National Policy for the empowerment of women in 2001. The goal of this Policy is to bring about the advancement, development

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[36]Mishra Sweta, "*Empowerment of Women in Urban Local Bodies: An Assessment*", Nagarlok, October-December, 2002 pp35-36.

[37]Fadia B. L, "*Indian Government and Politics*", Sahitya Bhawan Publications, Agra, 2004, p-928

[38] Ibid,pp 928-929.

[39]Goel Aruna, "*Women Empowerment: Myth or Reality*", Deep and Deep Publication, Delhi,2009p-40

and empowerment of women and to eliminate all forms of discrimination against women and to ensure their active participation in all spheres of life and activities.[40]

The Tenth Plan (2002-2007) adopted 3 fold strategies for empowering women based on the prescriptions of the National Policy for empowerment of women. These are (i)Social Empowerment through creation of an enabling environment through various affirmative developmental policies and programmes for development of women besides providing them easy and equal access to all the basic minimum services so as to enable them to realize their full potentials, (ii)Economic Empowerment by making women economically independent and self-reliant through training, employment and income-generation activities with both forward and backward linkages; and (iii)Gender Justice by eliminating all forms of gender discrimination and to allow women to enjoy rights and fundamental freedom within all spheres, viz., political, economic, social, civil, cultural, etc[41]

Eleventh plan (2007-2012) for the first time recognised that women are not just as equal citizens but as agents of economic and social growth. The eleventh plan suggested some measures in order to bring gender equality. These are: (i) Provide women with basic entitlements, (ii) Address the reality of globalization and its impact on women by prioritizing economic empowerment, (iii) Ensure an environment free from all forms of violence against women(physical, economic, social, psychological, etc.,), (iv) Ensure the participation and adequate representation of women at the highest policy levels, particularly in Parliament and State Assemblies, and (v) Strengthen existing institutional mechanisms and create new ones for gender mainstream and effective policy-implementation. [42]

Significance of the Study

Development of women has always been the central focus in the developmental planning of India. But the social structure of Indian society gives women a

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[40] Ibid, pp42-43

[41] Ibid, p 54

[42] Ibid, pp54-57

secondary position. They are oppressed in all spheres of life and are treated as weaker sex. This has affected their all-round development. They lag behind in terms of economic participation, education and political participation. Women, who constitute half of the population, could not be neglected for long. Their exclusion from mainstream of social and political life is bound to create hindrance in the development process, and prosperity of the nation is bound to be adversely affected. Discrimination in any form against women goes against the principle of equality as enshrined in our Constitution.

In order to ensure empowerment of women in political arena, the issue of reservation of $1/3^{rd}$ seats for women in grass-root level organization was taken up by different women's organizations and social thinkers. Accordingly, the Government of India passed the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendment Acts in 1992. These Acts provide 33% reservation of seats for women at all levels of both rural and urban elected bodies. Similarly, one-third positions of Chairpersons and Deputy Chairpersons in local bodies have been reserved for women. Reservation mainly provided to ensure their participation which will eventually lead to their empowerment and make them effective partner in the development process. It is assumed that political and economic empowerment will improve conditions of women and they will be closer to getting justice and equality. Since the urban and rural local bodies play a vital role in ensuring people's participation in the development process, it is felt that political empowerment of women through reservation of seats in rural and urban local bodies will train them in exercising their power in decision making and remove social and economic discriminations against them.

The present study entitled "Local Self Government and Women Empowerment: A comparative study of Women's Participation in Rural and Urban Local Bodies in South Assam" examines the nature of women participation in Local Self-Government. In order to do this attempt is made to understand the awareness level of women members about the goals, functions, workings, proceeding of meetings and financial matter of local bodies. Attempt is also made to examine the nature of their participation in various aspects such as their contribution to

development of their locality, whether they are able to perform all the functions which they were like to perform, whether they perform their functions by themselves or by someone else, if functions perform by 'other' who does it, their nature of participation in the meetings of local bodies and etc. An understanding of their participation in local bodies will enable us to reflect on two important issues, i.e. whether there is any change in their role within the family and society so far as the decision making is concerned and what has been its impact on their empowerment. Their empowerment is examined through various determinants such as changes in women after becoming member, assessment of their work and areas where they feel empowered.

Survey of Literature

A number of studies have been made on the Local Self- Government and Women Empowerment in India.

Empowerment of Women through Panchayati Raj Institutions (Maitreyi Choudhuri, 1998) reveals that a vast majority of women members in West Bengal were not at all willing to contest for the Panchayat seats. They had to do so only on the requests from their husbands, relatives or party members without any prior knowledge of their political responsibilities. The study found that most of the questions asked by the interviewers were answered by the male members of the households and in few cases, the women Panchayat members even did not appear in the front of the interviewers. The survey shows that women Panchayat members are gradually becoming aware of their responsibilities but still there are miles to go.[43]

Women's Leadership in the Panchayati Raj with special reference to the State of West Bengal (Sukla Deb Kanoongo, 2000) found that many women, in spite of being educated, of having a tradition of political activity in the family and of having great support from their respective parties, are unable to participate in

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[43] Choudhuri Maitreyi, "*Empowerment of Women through Panchayati Raj Institutions*" in Asha Mukherjee and Kumkum Bhattacharjee(Ed), **Conditioning and Empowerment of Women**, Gyan Publishing House, New Delhi, 2003, pp225-231.

the whole process in a meaningful way. Many are finding the responsibilities very demanding, some are thoroughly engaged in their domestic responsibilities and some do not maintain good health. He also felt that the socio-cultural factors acted as a deterrent in many cases.[44]

Women in Panchayati Raj Institutions: A case study in Goa (Seema P. Salgoankar 2000) maintained that since long, women have been deprived of participation in decision making. Their potentials remain largely unrecognized and their contributions are often overlooked. Several factors are responsible for women's low participation; the most important are illiteracy, traditionalism, prejudices, economic dependency and the unfavourable political opportunity structure, with its high rate of predominantly male incumbency and slow turnover. The dire need today is to remove the disparity between women's formal political equality and their meaningful exercise of political power.[45]

Empowerment of Women in Urban Local Bodies (Sweta Mishra, 2002) revealed that the 74th Amendment has made it possible for the common men to become part of the planning and execution process of development in relation to their local needs. It has empowered both the local bodies and women as a whole. According to the author the empowerment of women and weaker sections would lead to good governance and greater transparency in Indian polity. It would also ensure change in the value structure of the society, bringing freedom, reducing oppression and inequality through next generation. The study reveals that the younger generation has succeeded over the older one and academically also; most of them are better educated. It is evident from the study that elections were fought on party line and many candidates sought the support of political parties in order to contest the municipal elections.[46]

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[44] Saxena Kiran (Ed), "*Women and Politics*", Gyan Publishing House, New Delhi, 2000, pp142-153

[45] Salgoankar P Seema, "*Women in Panchayati Raj Institutions: A case study in Goa*" in Kiran Saxena(ed), **Women and Politics**, Gyan Publishing House, New Delhi, 2000, pp142-153.

[46] Mishra Sweta, "*Empowerment of Women in Urban Local Bodies: An Assessment*", Nagarlok, October-December, 2002 pp35-37

Women in Power (Mary E John, 2002)   focuses on two related issues, the problem of so-called "proxy" women, i.e., women who are stand-ins for male relatives, usually politician husbands. The existing scheme of reservations and the rotation of reserved seats over successive elections, it has been said, encourage the election of such proxies. And the second related question concerns the very rationale behind women's reservations, namely, the need to have a mass of women in the political arena. The paper argues that the proxy issue is far more complex. The subject women in power turn out to be quite an intractable one, and raise many new questions for feminism and the women's movement.[47]

Empowerment of Women in Urban Local Bodies for Good Governance (Girish K Mishra, 2002) revealed that 74th Constitutional Amendment Act has empowered the women leaders and it had opened a channel for them to occupy a legitimate space in the power structure. But there are obstacles in the process of their empowerment like control of their partymen, husband, relatives and responsibilities at home. Some measures are being undertaken by women leaders themselves to overcome the obstacles. The study emphasised that women leaders need orientation, sensitisation, capacity building, information, counselling continuously through organisations like NGOs. Author is of the view that special attention is needed in the case of Dalit women leaders. They are the worst suffers particularly those who are uneducated among them.[48]

Empowering Women through Reservation: A Perceptual Survey of Urban Local Bodies (Sushma Yadab, 2002) revealed that the principles of empowerment and reservation share a common logic. The study refers that 74th Amendment Act is a radical step to empower women in India. As a result of reservation, several women have been elected to representative positions and are also in a position to determine their future as well as of their entire constituency. The study revealed that reservation has brought a sea change in the values and

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[47] John Mary E, "*Women in Power*", Economy and Political Weekly, September - October, 2007.

[48] Mishra Girish K, "*Empowerment of women in Urban Local Bodies for Good Governance*", in Nagarlok, Special Issue on Empowerment of Women and Good Urban governance, Vol. XXXIV, October-December, 2002, pp.51-58.

attitudes of society towards the women. It has helped to bring social, political and economic development of women as a class.[49]

Political Empowerment of Women Under 74th Amendment Act (Sewa Singh and Ravindra Singh, 2002) shows that 74th Amendment Act has been able to increase the participation of women in the affairs of urban local bodies to an extent. But, it has not been able to politically empower the women in the real sense. Both the male councillors and the male members of the families of the women councillors do not seem to have been able to digest their empowerment and thus create impediments in their real political empowerment. The study revealed that traditional male dominated character of the society and the household responsibilities that the women are expected to discharge seem to be the greatest hindrance in the empowerment of women. The study suggests that only reservation for women in urban local bodies is not enough rather serious efforts are required at the social and economic fronts to empower women in real sense.[50]

Participation of Women in the Panchayati Raj System (G S Mehta, 2002) found that *pardha* system and traditionally developed certain social and cultural evils were more prevalent among the women of upper castes than the lower caste. The unmarried girls had some more opportunities than the married women to participate in different activities. The study also found that women with socio-economically and politically sound family background had mainly received the advantages of reservation policy. The study revealed that women were participating in the different development programmes along with their male counterparts but the rate of participation of women as the beneficiaries was comparatively lower than men. Over and above around half of the women representatives of different village Panchayats had experience at least some

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[49] Yadab Sushma , "*Empowering Women through Reservation: A Perceptual Survey of Urban Local Bodies*", in Nagarlok, Special Issue on Empowerment of Women and Good Urban Governance, Vol.XXXIV, October-December, 2002,pp-22-28.

[50] Singh Sewa and Singh Ravindra, "*Political empowerment of Women Under 74th Amendment Act*" in Nagarlok, Special Issue on Empowerment of Women and Good Urban governance, Vol.XXXIV, October-December, 2002, pp-29-34.

degree of changes as occurred in their social status, mainly through participating at local level social and cultural programmes.[51]

Political Empowerment of Women: Towards the 73rd Constitutional Amendment (Snehalata Panda, 2002) revealed that the reservation provided to women created the 'necessary enabling conditions for their empowerment,' their sustained interest and involvement in public affairs. It also shows that after 73rd Amendment Act women could become more articulate, function autonomously, and would be able to identify the problems in their respective areas fixing the priorities, become aware of gender discrimination and likely to come up as checks and balances on the traditional holders of political power. Reservation has provided the preliminary and foundational step to women to overcome the barriers of tradition by participating in the PRIs. The study revealed that political empowerment of women at the grassroots level institutions of democracy is a small step in the great leap forward to provide political space and enhance women's capabilities in decision making.[52]

Empowering Rural Women (Sujit Kumar Ghosh & Dilip Kumar Ghosh, 2002) revealed that on the force of the 73rd Amendment Act women were brought to the Panchayati Raj Institutions. Hence, they are very new to the system. They require lot of back-up support not only from the rural development administration, but also from the experienced and senior members. The study finds that government of west Bengal has taken up schemes for providing training to all members of PRIs. But one time training is not proved sufficient for women members as most of them are totally new to the system. Many women members even after two years of coming to the Panchayat bodies most of things remain new to them and they have to depend on officials of Gram Panchayats and blocks for each and every activity. This situation needs to be changed at any cost. Until and unless

[51] Mehta G. S, "*Participation of Women in the Panchayati Raj System*", Kanishka Publishers, Distributors, New Delhi, 2002

[52] Panda Snehalata, "*Political Empowerment of Women: Towards the 73rd constitutional Amendment*", Raj Publications, New Delhi, 2002, pp-17-38.

these new leaders are empowered adequately, empowerment of rural women will remain a distant dream.[53]

Women's Participation in Urban Local Self-Governance: Empowerment and Capacity Building(Durgesh Nandini, 2002) emphasized that constitutional guarantees alone do not ensure effective participation and political equality. To gain entry into political institutions and functioning of the state, women and women groups have to make special effort. This would lead to a situation where women are able to reverse the existing situation and bring about the necessary changes in policy and the social structure so as to ensure a mere equitable, effective and humane order. The study emphasised that women's movement is a powerful agent of empowerment. The movement must provide a support system for women who enter in political process to win elections. It is important to adopt a common strategy to bring about changes in the policies and structures that perpetuate the women's subordinate status.[54]

Women in Panchayati Raj Institutions (Amal Mandal, 2003) found that elected women Panchayat representatives are relatively younger in age, mostly married and the political participation of women depends on a number of preconditions like understanding of the process, information of the problems, deliberative skill, dominant position in the party, hierarchy in the party based process and more importantly the organisational position a group posses in a given socio-political order. The study found that statutory reservation has become the gateway for women to participate in the Panchayat process. It is also found that participation of women in Panchayat decision making process in terms of attendance, opinion expressed, and issue raised in the Panchayat meetings is noteworthy. Women are not meek or mute spectators or ornaments in decision making process. Moreover,

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[53]Dutta Sujit Kumar and Ghosh Dilip Kumar, "*Empowering Rural women*", Akansha Publishing House, New Delhi, 2002, pp96-110

[54]Nandi Durgesh, "*Women's Participation in Urban Local Self-Governance: Empowerment and Capacity Building*", in Nagarlok, Special Issue on Empowerment of Women and Good Urban governance, Vol.XXXIV, October-December, 2002, pp-70-74

they maintained contact with villagers, took villagers demand into cognisance and tried to deliver whatever possible for them.[55]

The Role of Women Members in the Decision Making Process of the Local Self Governing Institutions of Assam: A case of Pub- Lumding Gaon Panchayat(Micro Project, Department of Political Science, Lumding College, Assam, 2004) revealed that after 1994 revolutionary changes has occurred in the sphere of sensitization of women with regard to their rights, liberties, social responsibilities, duties etc and the level of empowerment of both male and female functionaries of Panchayat system has risen considerably. Panchayati Raj Institutions have brought about a revolutionary change in ensuring the women's participation in public political life, empowering and sensitizing the rural population, particularly women about their rights, liberties, duties and responsibilities towards the family and the community as a whole. The study shows that the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act, 1992 which provides 33% reservation of seats for women in Panchayati Raj Institutions is a breakthrough in providing women empowerment.[56]

Participation of Women and Dalits in Gram Panchayat (B Devi Prasad and S Haranath, 2004) shows that once elected, during the course of their functioning, the women members faced a number of difficulties like illiteracy, agricultural field related work, household work, inability to go alone to the offices, male dominance, cultural limitations, difficulty in meeting, *purdah* system, lack of knowledge about the system, lack of outside exposure and physical mobility in entering into politics. The study reveals that reservation has both affirmative and negative responses. Affirmative role of reservation are- provided a political space, provided an opportunity to come out into the public, provide an opportunity to share women's problem with a male leader, improvement in their

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[55] Mandal Amal, "*Women in Panchayati Raj Institutions*", Keisha Publishers, Distributors, New Delhi, 2003

[56]Department of Political Science, Lumding College, Lumding, Assam, Micro Project, " *The Role of Women Members in the Decision Making Process of the Local Self Governing Institutions of Assam: A case of Pub Lumding Gaon Panchayat*, 2004.

attire in public appearances and gave social status. The negative role of reservation are- cannot take leadership roles, dependence on male relatives, and lack of competence.[57]

Panchayats and Women(Nirmala Buch, 2004) found that in the post 73rd Amendment majority of women Panchayat members are illiterate and a large percentage are from families in the lower socio-economic strata. They are comparatively younger than the earlier entrants and are predominantly first generation entrants to public/political life. Because of constitutional provision of reservation of seats, the male members have discovered the importance of women and encouraged them to stand for elections leading to beliefs in their being only 'proxies'. According to author women are slowly learning how to build alliances with other social collectives, with other women and with other sections to build their initial entry in public life.[58]

Participation of Women in Panchayati Raj Institution, UP (Prabha Singh, 2005) points out that woman of Panchayats are yet to be politically empowered. Orthodox rural society, patriarchal and feudal forces, illiteracy resulting in lack of access to information and media and poor exposure to outside world make rural women extremely weak and vulnerable than the women in urban areas. Husbands of women Panchayat representatives take over the role of women representatives. The paper emphasized that women have to be conscious of their duties as representatives of womenfolk. Women proved to be capable of showing their representatives but they need time, support, resources, training and freedom from men. If women members gets all these, they definitely will make the 73rd and 74th constitutional amendment meaningful.[59]

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[57] Prasad B. Devi and Haranath S, "*Participation of Women and Dalits in Gram Panchayat*", in Journal of Rural Development Vol. 23(3), NIRD Hyderabad, 2004, July- September, pp 297-317.

[58] Buch Nirmala, "*Panchayat and Women*", in Verma Bihari Sawalia and Shiv Kumar Singh(Ed), **Rural Development Through Women's Participation and Electonic Media,** Pointer Publishers, Jaipur,2004, pp223-237.

[59] Singh Prabha, " *Participation of Women in Panchayati Raj Institutions*" in J.L. Singh(Ed), **Women and Panchayati Raj**, Sunrise Publications, Delhi, 2005, pp281-299.

Decentralization of Power: A Case of Women Empowerment (Banti Chakraborty, 2005) found that if the empowerment is aimed at bringing in high esteem and self-emancipation of the women, the women are yet to achieve this goal. The study revealed that with regard to the acceptance of women's entity at per with that of male, the society is yet to overcome a number of inhibitions like the socio-cultural status of the women, economic background of the families, conventional taboos and norms which go against women even within the family and self-realization by the women themselves regarding their importance in the society. The study points out that the attitude of negligence in which they have been brought up had imbibed in them a sense of inferiority and overcoming this will require conscious effort on the part of both sexes to recognize the importance of the role of women in the economic development of our country.[60]

Women Empowerment for Functional Efficiency in Decentralized Planning at Bottom Level(Tapati Dasgupta, 2005) points out that the Indian constitution, which was framed in 1950 has equipped women with much theoretical strength, but in practice, there lies huge disparity between theory and practice. The real breakthrough in women's involvement in politics, administration and development came only in recent years with the promulgation of 73rd Constitutional Amendment. What is necessary today is not election or selection, but injection and insertion of skill and capability in women to plan, implement and manage the programmes of development and welfare. The study reveals that if women have to become an important partner of development and welfare in society, it is not the political philosophy or the party in power, but the acumen and capability in women, which need to be enhanced and refined.[61]

Women and Panchayati Raj Institutions(R C Agarwal, 2005) revealed that there has emerged a category of women who are quite active and aspire for

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[60] Chakraborty Bani, "*Decentralization of Power: A Case of Women Empowerment*", in Purnendu Sekhar Das(Ed), **Decentralized Planning and Participatory Rural Development**, Concept publishing Company, New Delhi, 2005, pp131-154.

[61] Dasgupta Tapati, "*Women Empowerment for Functional Efficiency in Decentralized Planning at Bottam Level*", in Purnendu Sekhar Das(Ed), **Decentralized Planning and Participatory Rural Development**, Concept Publishing Company, New Delhi, 2005, pp121-130.

higher political posts. They have generally had political background. The male members have also accepted their importance and have encouraged them to contest elections even for the apex post in Panchayat. The paper also points out that there is also a class of women who hesitate to come in politics for various reasons like lack of safety and security, illiteracy, ignorance, lack of training, lack of awareness about powers and duties, lack of adequate leadership quality, and economic backwardness etc. According to author majority of women in India does not want to involve Politics as the sociological, cultural and religious factors have suppressed them to participate in politics. The author points out that woman in India are kept as subordinates as majority of them depend upon men for lively hood and to perform various social functions.[62]

Panchayati Raj and Women Empowerment (Suman Lata, 2005) points out that Indian democracy is more than half century old, but unfortunately after more than five decades of independence the process of women's political empowerment is still a dream for the average Indian women. Because of reservation huge number of women came into the public area but the quality of participation in the Panchayat bodies is not effective. Most of the elected women members have no idea, as to what being an elected member really means, and just do what the men (brother, father, father-in law and husband) tell to them. Author also points out that due to lack of confidence, the elected women do not know what their rights as village administrators. [63]

Participatory Democracy and Women's Performance in Panchayati Raj Institutions: Evidence from Madhya Pradesh (Yatindra Singh Sisodia, 2006) points out that as a result of reservation participation of women in the political process has been ensured and they are now playing a constructive role in development and welfare activities. The study revealed that with the passage of time women leadership is progressing in a positive direction. They have become more assertive, independent of various constraints and aware of the systematic

[62] Agarwal R. C, "*Women and Panchayati Raj*", in J.L. Singh(Ed), **Women and Panchayati Raj**, Sunrise Publications, Delhi, 2005, pp68-73

[63] Lata Suman, "*Panchayati Raj and Women Empowerment*", in J.L. Singh(Ed), **Women and Panchayati Raj**, Sunrise Publications, Delhi, 2005, pp231-244

process. This will lead to positive changes in the entire socio-political system. The study recommends that if women empowerment has to be successful, then existing feudal and patriarchal structure in most part of the country has to be dismantled. Moreover, it is necessary to do away with illiteracy and socio-economic deprivations, equip women with powers, sufficient training programmes and change in the attitude of their men folk and administration. The study points out that these problems are, of course, initial hurdles. With the passage of time and gaining experience women leadership will become more mature and effective.[64]

Women Empowerment and Panchayati Raj Institutions in Kerala (M. Samad, 2007) is a study on women empowerment through local bodies. It shows that in Kerala there is not much hindrance to women's participation in political activities. According to him a family is willing to rise to the occasion and free women from her household burden facilitating her to take up the new assignment. The study revealed that revolutionary changes were brought out by 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments in the society especially among women in Kerala. Kerala has become a model to others in gender justice and hundreds of women in Kerala have attained political empowerment and this has happened only because of 73rd Constitutional Amendment.[65]

Empowering Women through Political Participation: The Experience of Panchayati Raj Institutions in Kerala (A Sushama Devi, 2007) reveals that women's increasing political participation is both a source and a signal of social change. The author pointed out that the process of empowerment in India has given women a chance to involve themselves in the decision making process. The study reveals that the political entry of women in Panchayats has brought about a remarkable change in women themselves, their families and their immediate

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[64] Singh Sisodia Yatindra, "*Participatory Democracy and Women's Performance in Panchayati Raj Institutions: Evidence from Madhya Pradesh*", in Jaya Arunachalam and U Lalpagan(Ed), **Development and Empowerment of Rural Women in India**, Rawat Publications, Jaipur, 2006, p225-243.

[65] Abdul Samad, "*Women Empowerment and Panchayati Raj Institutions in Kerala*", Kurukshetra, a Journal on Rural Development, March, 2007,pp37-41

community. The study found that the reservation of seats for women is a great step towards democratization at the grassroots level and has helped in developing more genuine voice of women. The study also pointed out that decentralization process has undoubtedly given greater visibility to women and gender issues first time in the history of the state but at the same time factors like low consciousness, prevailing political culture, growing violence character assassination, unscrupulous struggles for power, lack of economics security are deterring women from effective participation in political life.[66]

Political Empowerment of Women: The Case of Karnataka's Experiments with Panchayati Raj (B S Bhargava & K Subha, 2007) found that Panchayati Raj has provided a common forum for social, economic, political and legal advancement of rural women. Now women are more than nominal in the political bodies and this is an epoch-making step in women's empowerment and political participation. The study revealed that more women have entered the local bodies and have represented various classes and castes. The study also points out that in order to generate the power necessary to bring about positive changes there is a need to raise the consciousness of women. They have to be mobilised as a political force so that they challenge oppressive forces. It is only through training and discovering their own talents and abilities; women can develop self confidence.[67]

The Experiences of Empowering Women Panchayat Members in India: Problems, Challenges and Opportunities(Nupur Tiwari,2007) The study points out that the main problem faced by the women members is in the exercise of the powers and function as a whole which have been provided by the constitution to them. This is because of lack of delegation, lack of resources and 'archaic'

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[66] Devi A Sushama, "*Empowering Women through Political Participation: The Experience of Panchayati Raj Institutions in Kerala*", in Review of Social Sciences, July- December, the Kerala Academy of Social Sciences, 2007, pp35-48.

[67] Bhargava B. S and K Subha, " *Political Empowerment of Women: The Case of Karnataka's Experiments with Panchayati Ra*j", in Ratna Ghosh and Alok Kumar Pramanik(Ed), **Panchayat System in India- Historical, Constitutional and Financial Analysis**, Kanishka Publishers, Distributors, New Delhi, 2007, pp169-187.

mindset of men in their home, society and in the bureaucracy. The study reveals that interference of government official and other influential persons in their jurisdiction' are the difficulties which are facing by women Panchayat representatives. Regarding the challenges the study clearly spelt out that there are structural, social and administrative issues. The study also points out that women in PRIs still lack the capacity and capability to force an issue, and that they are hamstrung by their ignorance of laws, rules, process and widely dispersed location in accomplishing what they want to achieve: empowerment of all women[68]

Political Representation and Empowerment: Women in the Institutions of Local Government (Evelin Hust, 2007) stated that the quota for women is indeed an important impetus to women's empowerment in rural India. However, the goal of women's empowerment will not be secured by quota alone; the process will take a long time. Traditional codes of behaviour which subordinates women cannot be removed overnight. In order to support and accelerate the process of empowerment, one has to employ additional strategies in order to promote self-reliance of women, build women capacities, and remove structural obstacles. The study also points out that social practice still prevent most rural women to take over responsibilities outside the confines of the Panchayat offices.[69]

Women's Political Participation and Changing Pattern of Leadership in Rural Areas of U.P (S.Waseem Ahmad, Nilofer and Gazala Parvem,2008) found that women, after being marginalized for long are being brought to the forefront through their involvement in decision making process. Passage of the 73rd and 74th Amendment Act played a key role in it. Through reservation, participation of women was given statutory status; this status is a channel to

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[68] Tiwari Nupur, "*The Experiences of Empowering Women Panchayat Members in India: Problems, Challenges and Opportunities*" in D Sundar Ram(Ed), **Panchayati Raj Reforms in India Power to the People at the Grassroots**, Kanishka Publishers, Distributors, New Delhi, 2007, pp212-231.

[69] Hust Evelin, "*Political Representation and Empowerment: Women in the Institutions of Local Government*", in Satyajit Singh and Pradeep K Sharma(Ed), **Decentralization Institutions and Politics**, Oxford University, Press, New Delhi, 2007, 225-274.

address the issue of women empowerment and to wipe away inequality prevailing in the society. It is evident that women aspire to come out of their traditional roles to create a new environment for the new generation but their assigned roles prevent them from discharging their roles effectively. The determinants that play lead role in deciding participation of women folk in governance includes caste, age, religion, education etc. Women of lower caste show better leadership skill than the women of higher caste.[70]

Women in Urban Local Governance: Empowerment through Participation (Prabhat Datta and Payel Sen, 2009) examines the question of empowerment of women in urban India through women participation in urban local bodies. It is found that there has been an increase in the number of elected women in unreserved wards in successive municipal elections. It also reveals that women have not been able to participate effectively due to a number of constraints. Along with reservation a favourable political will, a number of complementary interventions need to be initiated to overhaul the patriarchal social structure. This calls for an organised and sustained mass movement to adequately represent women's interests. It suggests that periodic training, orientation and sensitisation can help women representatives to perform their assigned functions in a better way.[71]

From the above survey it is seen that these studies have focussed on different dimensions and areas of local self government and women empowerment in India. Two viewpoints emerge from this survey. First, the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendment Acts are revolutionary steps towards women's participation in the political process of our country. Reservation has brought a sea change in the values and attitudes of society towards the women. It has helped to

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[70] Ahamad S. Waseem Nilofer and Parveen Gazala , *"Women's Political Participation and Changing Pattern of Leadership in Rural Areas of U.P"*, in the Indian Journal of Political Science, July- Sept, 2008,pp660-671

[71] Datta Prabhat and Sen Payel, *"Women in Urban Local Governance: Empowerment through Participation",* in the Journal of Governance and Public Policy, Vol. 4, Nos. , September & December 2009, pp. 48-61

bring social, political and economic development of women as a class. These Acts brought about a remarkable change in women themselves, their families and their immediate community. After the 73rd and 74th Amendments, a large number of women are getting elected in rural local bodies. Now the woman members are not only participating in the political process at the grass root level but they are also contributing to the development process of our country. By getting elected in rural and urban local bodies they are not only empowering themselves but also these elected women members are contributing a lot in the empowerment of women of our society.

Second, there are some hurdles in the process of women empowerment and participation although women members are gradually becoming aware of their responsibilities, powers and functions of local self government. There is problem of the so-called "proxy women" because of reservation. There are few elected women members who are members only in name and their power and functions are undertaken by someone else like by their husband, son, father-in-law etc. The survey also reveals that few women members were not at all willing to contest for the local bodies seats. They had to do so only on the requests from their husbands, relatives or party members without any prior knowledge of their political responsibilities. There are many obstacles in the process of their empowerment and participation. These are control of husband/family members, family responsibility, control of political party, lack of education, lack of training, socio- cultural limitations, financial insecurity, low consciousness and etc. The studies emphasised that women leaders need orientation, sensitisation, capacity building, information, counselling to eradicate different obstacles against women participation and empowerment.

All the studies discuss one or other aspects of the problem. Moreover, no known study has so far been made on women's participation in Local Self- Government in Southern part of Assam from empowerment perspective. The present study entitled "Local Self-Government and Women Empowerment: A comparative study of Women's Participation in Rural and Urban Local Bodies in South Assam" examines the nature of women participation in Local Self- Government.

An understanding of their participation in these bodies will enable us to reflect on two important issues, i.e. whether there is any change in their role within the family and society so far as the decision making is concerned and what has been its impact on their empowerment. The present study makes a humble attempt to focus on local self government and women empowerment.

Objectives

1. To examine the impact of socio-economic background on women members.
2. To examine the hurdles to their political participation.
3. To examine the difference in the nature of participation of women members in urban and rural local bodies.
4. To understand the role of elected women members in the decision making process both in the local bodies and family.
5. To understand the relation between their participation in local bodies and empowerment.

Research Questions

1. Do the socio-economic backgrounds of the elected member determine the participation and empowerment of women?
2. What is the level and nature of participation of women in local self-government?
3. What is the role of elected women members in the decision making process both in the local bodies and family?
4. What is the impact of their participation in local bodies on their empowerment?
5. Do the urban areas provide favourable environment for the active participation of women members than in the rural areas?
6. Does the patriarchal social system hamper the empowerment of women in both rural and urban areas?

Methodology

A. Study Area

Present study is conducted in three districts i.e., Cachar, Karimganj and Hailakandi of South Assam. Study area is divided into two parts- urban study area and rural study area.

Urban Study Area (Municipal Bodies)

In urban area there are four Municipal Boards and two Town Committees in Cachar, Karimganj and Hailakandi districts. All the Municipal Boards and Town Committees have been selected as study area. District wise name of the Municipal Boards and Town Committees are presented below.

Cachar District

1.   Silchar Municipal Board
2.   Lakhipur Municipal Board

Karimganj District

1.   Karimganj Municipal Board
2.   Badarpur Town Committee

Hailakandi District

1.   Hailakandi Municipal Board
2.   Lala Town Committee

Rural Study Area (Panchayati Bodies)

In rural area there are three Zilla Parishads in Cachar, Karimganj and Hailakandi districts of South Assam and all the Zilla Parishads have been selected as study area. 10% of the Anchalik Panchayats and 10% of the Gaon Panchayats of Cachar, Karimganj and Hailakandi districts of South Assam have been selected through simple random sampling as study area. District wise name of the Zilla Parishads, selected Anchalik Panchayats and Gaon Panchayats are presented below:

Cachar District

Name of the Zilla Parishad: - Cachar Zilla Parishad

Name of the selected Anchalik Panchayats in Cachar district: - In Cachar district there are fifteen Anchalik Panchayats and out of fifteen Anchalik Panchayats 10% of the Anchalik Panchayats have been selected through simple random sampling method as study area. 10% of the Anchalik Panchayats i.e., two Anchalik Panchayats viz, (1) Narsingpur Anchalik Panchayat and (2) Katigora Anchalik Panchayat have been selected as study area.

Name of the selected Gaon Panchayats in Cachar district: - In Cachar district there are one sixty three (163) Gaon Panchayats and out of one sixty three (163) Gaon Panchayats 10% of the Gaon Panchayats have been selected through simple random sampling method as study area. 10% of the Gaon Panchayats i.e., sixteen Gaon Panchayats have been selected as study area. Name of the selected Gaon Panchayats are (1)Behara Gaon Panchayat, (2) Pabda Gaon Panchayat, (3)Jirighat Gaon Panchayat, (4) Bhubandhar Gaon Panchayat, (5)Borjalenga Gaon Panchayat, (6) Panibhora Gaon Panchayat, (7) Puthikhal Gaon Panchayat, (8)Rajatilla Gaon Panchayat, (9)Ghungoor Gaon Panchayat, (10) Machughat Gaon Panchayat, (11) Rongpur Gaon Panchayat, (12) Tikalpar Gaon Panchayat, (13) Buribail Gaon Panchayat, (14) Baladhan Kanakpur Gaon Panchayat, (15) Sildubi Gaon Panchayat and (16) Sonabarighat Gaon Panchayat.

Karimganj District

Name of the Zilla Parishad: - Karimganj Zilla Parishad

Name of the selected Anchalik Panchayat in Karimganj district: - In Karimganj district there are seven Anchalik Panchayats (Blocks) and out of seven Anchalik Panchayats 10% of the Anchalik Panchayats have been selected through simple random sampling method as study area. 10% of the Anchalik Panchayat i.e., one Anchalik Panchayats viz, Badarpur Anchalik Panchayat have been selected as study area.

Name of the selected Gaon Panchayats in Karimganj district: - In Karimganj district there are ninety six (96) Gaon Panchayats and out of ninety six (96) Gaon

Panchayats 10% of the Gaon Panchayats have been selected randomly as study area. 10% of the Gaon Panchayats i.e., nine Gaon Panchayats have been selected as study area. Name of the selected Gaon Panchayats are (1) Dullabchra Gaon Panchayat, (2) Charagi Gaon Panchayat, (3) Hatikhira Gaon Panchayat, (4) Balipipola Gaon Panchayat, (5) Pathu Surigram Gaon Panchayat, (6) Jatkapon Borkotpur Gaon Panchayat, (7)Baroigram Gaon Panchayat, (8) Chorgula Ghoramara Gaon Panchayat and (9) Anglar Bazar Gaon Panchayat.

Hailakandi District

Name of the Zilla Parishad: - Hailakandi Zilla Parishad

Name of the selected Anchalik Panchayat in Hailakandi district: - In Hailakandi district there are five Anchalik Panchayats (Blocks) and out of five Anchalik Panchayats 10% of the Anchalik Panchayats have been selected through simple random sampling method as study area. 10% of the Anchalik Panchayats i.e., one Anchalik Panchayats viz, Katlichara Anchalik Panchayat have been selected as study area.

Name of the selected Gaon Panchayats in Hailakandi district: - In Hailakandi district there are sixty two (62) Gaon Panchayats and out of one sixty two (62) Gaon Panchayats 10% of the Gaon Panchayats have been selected through simple random sampling method as study area. 10% of the Gaon Panchayats i.e., six Gaon Panchayats have been selected as study area. Name of the selected Gaon Panchayats are (1) Lalamukh Gaon Panchayat (2) Narainpur Tupkhana Gaon Panchayat (3) Banshbari Gaon Panchayat (4) Gharmurah Gaon Panchayat (5) Dholchara Bilaipur Gaon Panchayat and (6) Sarbanandapur Gaon Panchayat.

B. Collection of Data

Data have been collected for the present study from both primary and secondary sources. Secondary information has been collected from books, journals and such other relevant documents and news papers like Assam tribune, Dainik Jugasanka etc. Census report, basic statistics of Assam, District statistical Handbooks have also been consulted.

For the purpose of collecting primary data field study has been conducted in the selected areas of study. The respondents have been administered schedule. In addition to this the Minutes of the meetings and other related information of selected rural and urban local bodies have been consulted. Besides these, data have also been collected from the offices of Zilla Parishad and Municipal Bodies.

Sample Size and Selection of Respondents

In urban study area there are four Municipal Boards and two Town Committees in Cachar, Karimganj and Hailakandi districts of South Assam. All the Municipal boards and Town Committees have been selected as study area. All together there are 37 elected women members in urban study area and all of them have been selected as respondents of the study.

There are three Zilla Parishads in study area and all the Zilla Parishads have been selected for the study. All together there are 22 elected women Zilla Parishad members in study area and all of them have been selected as respondents of the study.

There are 27 Anchalik Panchayats in rural area (Cachar-15, Karimganj- 7and Hailakandi-5) and 10% of the Anchalik Panchayats have been selected through simple random sampling method as study area. Accordingly we have selected 4 Anchalik Panchayats (Cachar-2, Karimganj- 1 Hailakandi- 1) for the study. Altogether there are 19 elected women Anchalik Panchayat members in selected Anchalik Panchayats and all of them have been selected as respondents.

There are 321 Gaon Panchayats in rural study area (Cachar-163, Karimganj- 96 and Hailakandi-62) and 10% of the Gaon Panchayats have been selected through simple random sampling method as study area. Accordingly we have selected 31 Gaon Panchayats for the study. Altogether there are 110 elected women members in selected Gaon Panchayats and all of them have been selected as respondents of the study.

Total Respondents of the Study (Rural and Urban)

Total respondents of the study are 188. Table Nos 1.1, 1.2 and 1.3 show the distribution of total respondents in the rural study area, urban study area and total respondents of the study.

Table No- 1.1

Distribution of Respondents by Panchayat Bodies

Name of the Panchayat Bodies	Women Members
Zilla Parishad	22
Anchalik Panchayat	19
Gaon Panchayat	110
Total	151

Table No- 1.2

Distribution of Respondents by Municipal Bodies

Name of the Municipal Bodies	Women Members
Municipal Board	31
Town Committee	6
Total	37

Table No- 1.3

Total Respondents of the study

Name of the Areas	Women Members
Rural	151
Urban	37
Total	188

Organization of the Chapters:

First chapter is divided into two sections. The first section deals with the meaning and characteristics of local self-government. It also deals with concepts related with local self-government such as delegation, devolution, deconcentration, decentralisation and democratic decentralisation. Section two includes discussion on the conceptual background of participation and empowerment, survey of literature, objectives, research questions, study area and methodology of the study. Second chapter gives a brief profile of the local self-government in Assam and it has four sections. First section deals with the profile of Panchayati Raj system in Assam. Second section deals with the profile of Municipal system in Assam. Third section deals with the profile of administrative system in Assam under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution. And finally, the fourth section deals with the profile of administrative system (Autonomous Council) under the State Legislation in Assam. Third chapter has two sections. First section deals with a brief socio-economic profile of the study area i.e., Cachar, Karimganj and Hailakandi districts and second section deals with the socio-economic profile of respondents i.e. elected women members of selected rural and urban local bodies. It also deals with a comparative analysis of the socio-economic profile of respondents of rural and urban local bodies. Fourth chapter focuses on the nature of women participation in rural and urban local bodies. It also deals with a comparative analysis of women participation in rural and urban local bodies. Chapter five presents the impact of reservation on women empowerment in rural and urban study area. It also presents a comparative analysis of rural and urban local bodies and empowerment of women. Finally, chapter six presents the summary and major findings of the study. It also presents some recommendations for improvement of women participation in grassroots level.

After presenting an introduction to the present study in this chapter we propose to present a brief profile of the local self-government in Assam in the next chapter.