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Enlarging Citizen Participation and Increasing Local Autonomy in India: A Critique on Panchyati Raj

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For the last couple of years, two important issues have become centrality in the debate on national development and democracy: enlarging citizen participation and increasing local autonomy. (Malaika Scott, 2004). The latter two are conceptualized and visualized through the methods of devolution or deconcentration of power or what is called establishment of local self-government at different levels. In fact, there has been a concern to deepen democratic self-government, enlarge citizen participation, reform the state both in terms of methods and structure as to give citizen larger voice, increase the effectiveness of public policies including service delivery; “enhance social capital by fostering social cohesion and trust within local communities, and finally, provide dispute-resolution mechanisms to manage conflicts peacefully at the local level.”

These realizations have come about with the growing political and economic upheavals during the last one or two decades. On the one hand, the failure of command and control systems coupled with the unresponsive state to the growing demands for democratization, and on the other, abuses of authoritarian regimes have led to the search for more responsive forms of government or “more democratic governance”. The best methods to increase the citizen participation are sought in the decentralization or local self-government. There are however other reasons too why the countries have resorted to or adopted decentralization: growing multiparty system, deepening democracy, marketization of economy or globalization, growing ethnic as well as social conflict. There are

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different ways by which decentralization is identified: deconcentration, decentralization by delegation and decentralization by devolution. Now majority of the countries across the world have adopted decentralization programmes:

Recent decade has seen the spurt in the local autonomy including the fact that it was backed by three important theoretical models: 1) Neo-Classical Public Choice Model; 2) The Public Finance and Public Administrative Theories and finally, Political Economy theory. It is in this context one has to locate why different countries have adopted different acts or methods to increase the citizen participation and make democracy more effective: Amartya Sen's argument in this context become most relevant who viewed that expansion of freedom is the basic need as well as the principal means of development. In fact, UNDP in its 2001 report argues that “the process of decentralization should not be viewed as an end itself, but rather as an integral factor in the attainment of Sustainable Human Development goals" (UNDP: 2001:4) It is becoming a fact that more than 95 per cent of the democratic countries are opting for devolving power to the local areas. “Some 95 per cent of democracies have elected sub national governments and countries everywhere are devolving political, fiscal and administrative powers to sub national tiers of governments or creation of local governance”. (James Katoirobo: 2004:4) This is even apparent in South Asia. Korea for example enacted The Local Autonomy Act (1998), similarly Philippines adopted Local Government Code (1991), Nepal adopted Local Self-Governance Act (1999), Pakistan enacted Local Government Ordinance (2001)( O.P.Mathur 2002:1)). Even in Latin America democratic decentralization or increasing local autonomy is slowly but steadily becoming a fact in such countries as Bolivia, Argentina, Brazil, Mexico and Venezuela. This has even spread to African continent- in this continent countries such as Ethiopia, Uganda, Mali, Ghana etc have opted for local autonomy.

One of the forms of decentralization (Abdul Aziz: 2002) can be seen in the realm of local self-governments or local autonomous institutions. However, Decentralization or governance is rooted in the notion of “effective citizenship” (civic engagement and social capital), “self-government” (community-based development), and “sustainable livelihoods” (http://www.networkideas.org/eco/apr2004/eb15_Decentralized_Planning.htm). It is also based on the notion that it would create spaces for accommodating large number of hitherto excluded
social categories or the marginalized groups such as women, poor, backward class/castes etc into the process of development. Further it helps in identifying the basic needs and preferences of the citizens' social categories through their direct participation; (Crook and Manor, 1998), including the fact that it increases the participation and also increases transparency, and ensure accountability and effective public delivery system (Satya Parkas Dash: 2002:590). Finally it helps in strengthening and expanding pluralistic politics and spaces for democratization (Neelima Deshmukh; 2005:192). UNDP report for example argues that, “Decentralization aims to bring government closer to people. Decisions made on the local level will be more sensitive to local conditions, more responsive to local needs and will allow for higher accountability and transparency; thus raising the level of good governance and further improving human development. Decentralization also provides an opportunity for broader participation and representation of all ethnic groups in the political decision-making process at the local level”(UNDP: 2004:11). This shows the shifting paradigms too: shift from the “top down” to the “bottom up” approach in development as well as participation, ensuring the participation of larger number of marginalized social categories: shift from development without participation to development with participation”

In India, unlike in other parts of the South Asia, the issues of citizen’s participation and local autonomy precipitated by the arguments that in India the different cleavages and multiple social differences have created intense social conflicts and also checkmated overall development. In the process, the poor, marginalized such as tribes, women, backward castes or classes are left out from the development paradigm. Other important reason for restricted participation of citizens is located in the too much concentration of power- both political and social- and the top down model of political/development model or the structure. It is in this context empowerment with development, which obviously means making disadvantaged groups “patrons of development” or “sharing power” becomes all the more important in India. This was concretized with the establishment of local self-government, which is aptly called Panchayati Raj System in India. Major breakthrough in the direction of local self-government came when 73rd and 74th amendment was introduced to the Indian constitution in 1993. This helped in the creation of three tier structures at the local level- Gram Sabhas to urban municipalities or Nagar Palikas.

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Local Government or the Panchayats:

Four important myths have been constructed in the context of demand for increasing local autonomy or citizens’ participation in India, especially when the issues of decentralization have been discussed. One of the myths is that the issues of decentralization are the result of globalization. This is because of the fact that globalization itself rests on certain presumption— that the countries or the states have become too much authoritarian, over developed, unresponsive countries, too corrupt, and lack accountability etc. The panacea for constructing new nation state lies in falling in line with globalization.

India did become part of globalization through structural adjustment or liberalization etc. However, one cannot accept the fact that decentralization of power in India is a phenomenon linked exclusively to globalization.

Corollary to the first, the second myth centers around the fact that increasing local autonomy or decentralization would downsize the state. This is because of the fact that it would transfer many of the functions that earlier the state was carrying on. On the contrary one can argue that it is making the state more effective. “Devolution can be a strategic response of a democratic state. Empowered Deliberative Democracy should replace Representative – Techno-Bureaucratic Democracy in promoting equity, quality of citizenship and producing better outcome”(Thomas Isaac: 2002)

Third important myth is that the India has no past history of local autonomy and thereby it is a modern notion too. Fourth important myth is that “industrialized countries are more decentralized than developing countries such as India”(Dele Olowu: 2004:1)

If we understand the decentralization in terms of local government, then one can conveniently argue that local government in India is not a recent phenomenon (http://www.bjp.org/NEM/panch.htm). The institutions of local government always existed in India from ancient period, (Mukesh Sharma, 2002) in one form or the other. (http://www.thp.org/sai00/india/panchayat.htm) They were an ancient form of local government, however they were based on the idea “when five (panch) elders come together, God will be present” We had tribal Panchayats, village Panchayats etc. Even the idea of Gram Swaraj was very
much inherent during the nationalist movement led by Gandhi. In 1909, nationalist movement led by Indian National Congress had passed a Resolution (http://www.panchayat.nic.in/speech/MinSpeech13 [1]. 04.05.htm) “to make all local bodies from village Panchayats upwards elective with elected non-official Chairmen”. Meanwhile one cannot deny the influence of Gandhi. Gandhi had the vision of a village system bereft of conflicts, contradictions and mutual antagonism. He would view total Self rule through Village self rule In other words in Gandhian idea, “Poorna Swaraj comes through “Gram Swaraj”. Further Gandhi argued, “The Panchayat shall have all the authority and jurisdiction required. This Panchayat will be the legislature, judiciary and executive combined to operate for its year of office. Here, there is perfect democracy based upon individual freedom”. On the contrary there was one opposing view. This view came from Dr. Ambedkar, the architect of Indian constitution. He viewed that self government in the villages in the present condition would have to live under the tyranny of vested interests.

Meanwhile one cannot deny the fact that modern form of local government in India is the by-product of colonial administration. For example urban local government owes its origin to Samuel Laing, who as a member of Viceroy’s Council (1861-62) argued in favour of distributing local service on the basis of local resources. During 1870, it was Lord Mayo, who introduced the concept of elected representatives in the urban municipalities. Nonetheless, it was Lord Rippon who brought in the concept of self-government in the urban municipalities. He is treated as the founding father of urban local government. Interestingly in 1919 Montingo-Chamesford made local self-government a transferred subject to the domain of Indian Ministers. This is the reason why in 1928 eight provinces of British India had different Panchayat Acts. (George Mathew: 1995) Interestingly different native states also followed the colonial suits. By 1926, six native states had introduced their own Panchayat Acts, later other states also introduced them. After independence the issues of local self-government were raised: through decentralization of power.

However, they could not able to root firmly in Indian context. This has been highlighted in the Statements of Objects and Reasons of the seventy third amendment to the Indian constitution: (http://indiacode.nic.in/coiweb/amend/amend73.htm) "Though the Panchayati Raj Institutions have been in existence for a long time, it has been observed that these institutions have not been able to acquire the status and dignity of viable and responsive people’s bodies.
due to a number of reasons including absence of regular elections, prolonged super sessions, insufficient representation of weaker sections like Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and women, inadequate devolution of powers and lack of financial resources”. However one cannot overlook the fact that increasing local autonomy could not able to realize for three more reasons: too much of bureaucratic hold, corruption and lack of transparency. This is the reason why the conflict between the rural population and the government was increasing. More than that there was a huge gap between the state and the rural side- the local population would hardly receive any information about the plans and actions of the Indian government including the different provincial governments. Further, the citizens lacked capacity or the means to influence policies, Programmes or resource allocation for the purpose of development. In fact the development paradigm that the local areas had to adopt was basically a top down one, and unconcerned about the local needs. This is the reason why there was a stress on the need for Panchayati Raj Institutions in India that would bring paradigm shift including the fact that it would enlarge the citizen participation. This is the reason why Panchayati Raj Institutions are called vividly: “little Republic”, Primary units of self-governance”, “part of deepening democracy”, primary units of “social justice” etc. In fact, “social justice” is most important for the reason that the Panchayati raj institutions tried to bring in large number of retrenched social categories into the mainstream of power politics. This is apparent in the way the women, schedule castes and tribes were made the part of grass root politics in India.

**Local Autonomy, Perspectives and Attempts:**

There were attempts to introduce local autonomy right after 1947 but in vain. In fact in the Directive Principle of State Policy, the Indian Constitution specified that the state governments would take steps to organize the village Panchayats- the latter as the seat of local autonomy and provide them with the required power and resources so as to make them the units of self-government. However, the issues of local autonomy or Panchayats became the state or provincial subject. There are four phases on the issues of local autonomy: first phase runs from 1955 till 1964; This phase is called phase of ascendancy. The second phase runs between 1965 and 1969- this is the phase of stagnation; third phase, which is called phase of decline runs between 1969 and 1983 and final phase begins from 1983 – phase of resurrection.
During all these period many committees were formed to study the issues of local autonomy, citizen participation. Taking into account the reports of committees one can view three important perspectives emerging from within. The first perspective can be called **Development Perspective** (http://planningcommission.nic.in/reports/sereport/ser/wbm/wbm_ch6.pdf). This is apparent in the first attempt, particularly of Balwant Rai Mehta Committee report which was appointed in 1957 to study the issues of community development and the extent of citizen participation within the larger framework of Community development. This committee envisaged directly elected local autonomous institutions called Panchayats for a village or a group of village. Further this committee emphasized the need for non-political Panchayats and there by stressed the need for citizen participation in the development in non-political manner. This is the first step towards local autonomy. Further it envisaged devolving necessary resources, power and authority and decentralized administrative system working under them. This has been called (Yogendra K. Alagh, 1-26) "revolutionary and historical step in the context of New India".

Second important committee that was formed was Ashok Mehta. Here the **Instrumentalist perspective** or approach is very much apparent. This particular Committee advocated citizens’ participation as political actors however, it was not without any weakness: it would advocate two tier system than three tiers as advocated by the earlier committee- Balwantra Committee. Interestingly both the Committees overlooked the importance of local Panchayats as the units of self-government in the article 40 of the constitution.

Nonetheless, Starting with Rajasthan several states introduced Panchayati Raj in quick succession. However, despite these recommendations the issues of local autonomy remained a mirage. There are reasons why such a situation aroused.

One, since the Panchayati Raj or the issues of local autonomy was dealt with as part of provincial subject, no two state agree for a common devolution pattern or pattern for local autonomy. Each state or province evolved its own pattern of structure. This came in the way of effective citizen participation

Two, it increasingly came under the bureaucratic influence or the tight hold of bureaucracy. Local institutions were treated as a part of state institutions.

Even the five-year plan documents vouched for the importance of local autonomy. Take the example of The draft fifth plan. It stated that "The basic concept behind establishing Panchayati Raj was to create rural local self
government agencies reasonable for discharging certain selected functions pertaining to development (http://www.punjabheritage.com/panchayat.htm. Panchayati Raj is the instrument of community development, the apparatus of rural local self government a means of reorganising district administration not adequately people oriented in its traditional form and an agent of state government for certain purposes.” However, the euphoria of local autonomy faded after 1960s till it was revived during 1980s. During this period decline was apparent in the way the elections to the local autonomous or Panchayati Institutions were postponed indefinitely, the growth or setting up of parallel institutions or bodies at the district level etc. Other than that the local institutions were also suffering from some inbuilt weakness: they had no power to raise the taxes or the resources so as to become financial autonomous, they had not provided enough spaces for the socially marginalized groups such as women, Scheduled Castes and Schedule Tribes to become part of political process, and finally there was hardly any transfer of power to the local autonomous institutions in the strict sense. However a shift in the primacy of local autonomy came about during late 1980s. In fact this was the decade when different countries at the global level were also stressing on local autonomous institutions. However there was similarity between the western concerns for the local autonomy as well of the concern that grew in India. In fact, there were two important reasons why the local autonomy was stressed; one important reason was the growing realization of a “too large” state or too much centralized power in the “too large state”. This it was believed would block the democratic spaces for large number of citizens”; second important reason was that empowerment of local institutions would introduce new paradigm of development—instead of top down to bottom up. This would enhances the individual autonomy.

During the decade of 1980s two important committees were appointed: G.V.K. Rao Committee appointed by the Planning Commission and L.V. Singhvi Committee. It is here the third perspective i.e., Constitutional Institutional perspective is apparent. This was for the first time stressed by the Singhvi Committee. It recognized the importance of Panchayati Raj Institution as part of Constitution, along with ensuring regular, free and fair election to the Local institutions. It is here one can find the third generation Panchayats. However, the original Panchayati Raj bill of 1989 was the first attempt to politically enfranchise retrenched or marginal social categories such as Scheduled Caste, Scheduled Tribes and women. To enfranchise economically, new schemes were introduced:

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Jawahar Rozgar Yojana (JRY) However, the issues of Panchayati Raj, or local autonomy received a constitutional status when Panchayati issue was incorporated in the Part IX of the Constitution of India.

**Radical Transformation and Local Autonomy:**

The 73rd and 15th amendment act became law on April 24 and June 1, 1993 respectively. In 1994, different states passed Conformity Act by reshaping their Panchayati Acts. This particular amendment made to the Indian constitution has been vividly explained and viewed: "beginning of a silent revolution" (http://www.indiatogether.org/2004/may/wom-panchayat.htm) "feminization of political leadership" (Mridula Epen, 2004) a “revolution based on maximum democracy and maximum devolution”, “a red-letter day in the history of panchyati raj”, and “indeed a far-reaching if not revolutionary” etc. There are 2,40,288 local government bodies (this include all the three tiers that function below the district level. Some of the main features of Constitutional amendment are as follows:

♦ It made permanent the three tier system throughout India, thereby helped in overcoming earlier ambiguities
♦ The three tier system constituted of village, intermediate and district level. However wherever the population is not exceeding two million there would be only village and district Panchayats
♦ It made regular election every five years compulsory. These elections would be conducted at all three levels. Election of the chairperson at the intermediate and district level will be done through indirect elections.
♦ It made provision for reservation
♦ It made provision for the reservation of seats for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in proportion to their population. Similar reservation is provided with regard to the office of Chairperson at all levels.
♦ One-third reservation for women. Similar reservation is made for the office of chairperson
♦ It created the provision of Village Assembly or Gram Sabha as the basic unit irreach village.
♦ Even states can make reservation for Backward classes
♦ It made the provision for State election Commission.
♦ It made uniform five-year term for all the Panchayats. However in the event of premature dissolution, it made it mandatory to conduct the election within six months of the date of the dissolution.

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| 1. Agriculture, including agricultural extension | ♦ Rural housing  
♦ Drinking water  
♦ Fuel and fodder  
♦ Roads, culverts, bridges, ferries, waterways and other means of communication  
♦ Rural electrification, including distribution of electricity  
♦ Non-conventional energy sources  
♦ Poverty alleviation Programmes  
♦ Education including primary and secondary schools  
♦ Technical training and vocational education  
♦ Adult and non-formal education |
| 2. Land improvement, implementation of land reforms, land consolidation and soil conservation | ♦ Libraries  
♦ Cultural activities  
♦ Markets and fairs  
♦ Health and sanitation, including hospitals, primary health centers and dispensaries  
♦ Family welfare  
♦ Women and child development  
♦ Social welfare, including welfare of the handicapped and mentally retarded  
♦ Welfare of the weaker sections, and in particular, of the scheduled castes and the scheduled tribes  
♦ Public distribution system  
♦ Maintenance of community assets |
| 3. Minor irrigation, water management and watershed development |  
| 4. Animal husbandry, dairy and poultry |  
| 5. Fisheries |  
| 6. Social forestry and farm forestry |  
| 7. Minor forest produce |  
| 8. Small scale industries, including food processing industries |  
| 9. Khadi (homespun cloth), village and cottage industries |  

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Major Tasks and Increasing Citizen Participation:

This amendment act to the Panchayati Raj helped in increasing the citizen participation as well as increasing the local autonomy. Increasing local autonomy is ensured in the following:

♦ Local Autonomy of the institutions has been ensured through the methods of granting maximum financial autonomy. Each Panchayats have been authorized to collect, levy and appropriate suitable local taxes.

♦ The increasing citizen participation is also ensured through free and fair election.

♦ They have been given autonomy in preparing plans and implementing schemes for social justice and economic development.

♦ These local institutions have been assigned twenty-nine tasks that the state can devolve to the Gram Sabhas, the lowest unit in the local autonomous institutions. They are

♦ Gram Sabha has been made as the last unit in the local level. Gram Sabha is nothing but the general assembly of villagers. It has the power to decide developmental work, suggest remedial measures for the purpose of economy as well as running the Panchayats, question and scrutinize the decisions including the financial matters of the Panchayats. It is in the Gram Sabha meeting that woman, rural poor and marginalized get the opportunity to discuss the issues of their village.

Increasing Citizen Participation through Rural Development Programmes:

Other than constitutional provisions, simultaneous attempts have been made to increase the citizen participation. One is through large number of schemes such as Sampoorna Grameena Rozgar Yojana (Complete Village Employment Scheme); Swarnjayanit Gram Swarozgar Yojana (SGSY); Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana (PMGSY); Indira Awaas Yojana (IAY); Pradhan Mantri Gramoddaya Yojana (PMGY); Credit Cum Subsidy Scheme; Samagra Awaas Yojana; Annapurna, Watershed Development Programmes Under DPAP and DDP, Computerization of Land Records (CLR) and Strengthening of Revenue Administration & Updating of Land Records, Accelerated Rural Water Supply Programme (ARWSP), Central Rural Sanitation Programme (CRSP); Swajaldhara, etc. These are the grand schemes, which aims at making the citizen participation as well as the local autonomy a fact. However one needs to ask the question as to how far these schemes have really succeeded in accentuating local autonomy. It is here one needs to focus on the way local autonomy as well as the citizen’s participation is dealt with at different provinces or states in India.

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States and Citizen’s Participation/Local Autonomy:

Although the issues of local autonomy was regarded as a matter specific to the states concerned, however, one can not overlook the fact that different states had different ideas about the local autonomy and citizen participation. Sometime the ideological moorings of the state backed them. This is obvious when we look at West Bengal as the case. The left front government which came to power in West Bengal had three important task in the initial stages: revitalizing the Panchayats so as to make the citizen’s participation an effective instrument of change; secondly, regeneration of rural economy and finally, changing the correlations of class forces in favour of poor. In the latter case its aim was to bring in social change at the grass root level.

However, one should not overlook the fact that two important debates have gone into the making of Panchayats in India. This is pertaining to the translation of institutions into a political one. One important argument or the debate stressed the need for converting local institutions into political institutions on the ground that they are critical for enlarging citizen’s participation as well tempo of democracy. On the other there are those who opposed it on the ground that, "self government through faction fighting will not be self government but self ruination" (T.R.S Sathishchandra, 2). West Bengal is credited with transforming local institutions into political one (M. Shivaiah et al., 1980), when no other state was dared to do it. This is followed by other states. Interestingly in other states when local autonomy was eroding due to political transformation of institution, however, it is in the West Bengal that they are strengthening as well as enlarging the citizen’s participation (Neil Webster, 1992). Interestingly they have not only become instruments of development but also platform for alternative development strategy. In fact West Bengal was the first state, which saw the radical politics growing from within, and also a state, which created political Panchayats or local autonomous institutions.

Given the social differences in India, three different patterns of citizens’ participations are available vis-à-vis the local autonomous institutions in different provinces or states: a) Elite and Progressive mobilization model (Maharashtra), b) Popular Mobilization from Below (West Bengal) c) Stalemate Conflict Model (Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, partly U.P) (Subrata Mitra: 2001) Many of the states or provinces fall under one or the other category. For example southern states such as Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Kerala, Rajasthan falls in the second category. Interestingly West Bengal is the only state, which has consistently conducted the election in regular intervals right from 1978. This is not the case with other states. However, first two models are important as they have succeeded
in enlarging citizens’ participation in the decision making, acted as effective channels of change from below, reduced the gender bias, social discrimination and increased the spaces for societal inclusion.

This is apparent at different level. Successful implementation of land reforms at the grass root level is one such instance of active participation and inclusive politics. This is apparent in West Bengal when the state introduced Operation Barga through the local autonomous institutions. Without the active participation of citizens the lands would not have been transferred; registration of sharecroppers would not have taken place and distributed to the landless, and finally land reform beneficiaries would not have got the institutional credit. Interestingly no other state used Panchayats as a means to bring change in the land relations. This is one of the reasons why the left front government again and again is elected in West Bengal.

One of the major gains of introducing the local autonomy is the fact that it has helped in reducing the poverty in certain pockets of rural side. This is apparent in the states like West Bengal. In 1978, the rural poverty—particularly people living below the poverty level was 73 per cent. The same has come down to 30 per cent by 1999-2000 (George Mathew, www.issin.org). This is because of the fact that the local autonomous institutions could able to introduce effectively the public delivery service, including the fact that they could able to implement public policies of the citizens. This trend is visible in Kerala, Andhra Pradesh as well as in Karnataka (http://indiabudget.nic.in/cs2001-02/chapt2002/chap102.pdf),

Further increasing local autonomy however has reduced social differences in different parts of India. It has helped large number of socially marginalized categories such as women to enter into the domain of politics as well local institutions- in 2006 in total 10,41,430 women were elected to the local institutions ; in states such as Maharashtra women participation, has increased from 4 per cent to 40 per cent (Neelima Deshmukh, 2005), in states such as Uttar Pradesh it has increased to 36 per cent. In terms of the number too, in some states women are more in number. For example in Uttara Pradesh 2,99,924 women were elected to local institutions, This is followed by Madhya Pradesh –1,34,368 in 2006. In total in India there are 9,77,298 women in Gram Panchayats, 1,55,960 women in Panchayat Samities and 5785 in Zilla Parishads- this is in away a complete paradigm shift in the power. They constitute more than the constitutionally required number- they constitute thirty six per cent of all representatives. They came from different background: good number of them had the background of participating in the movements or in the literary campaigns. This is true of other categories such as Scheduled Caste and Tribes. However, mere number is not
enough, their participation as citizens would become most effective only when such groups are recognized as stake-holders and the local institutions—both rural as well as urban—are given more autonomy.

This does not mean that all the states have given the local autonomy an equal status. Let us take the case of The Provisions of the Panchayats (Extension to the Scheduled Areas) Act, 1996 (Report of the Committee of Members of parliament and Expert Constituted to make recommendations on the silent features of the Law for extending provisions of the Constitution (74th amendment Act 1992) to Scheduled Areas, Ministry of Urban Affairs, 1995). This acts extends Panchayats to the tribal’s areas in eight states such as Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Gujarat, Himachal Pradesh, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Orissa and Rajasthan. This is just to bring in back tribes as “citizens” and treat them on par with the other citizens. Two states however yet to give effect or adopt Scheduled Area act, particularly Bihar and Rajasthan. Incidentally Bihar has substantial presence of tribals.

However in the matters of providing reservation to different backward classes, not all the states have adopted similar rule. Karnataka, which is at the forefront in effectively introducing local autonomy, has advanced reservation for the backward classes (A.P. Kripa and G.S. Ganesh Rao, 2000). Similarly Andhra Pradesh has provided thirty four per cent reservation to Other Backward Classes. This has helped in other socially backward classes to enter into the political domain and participate as “citizens” and not as subjects.

Incidentally different states have different features with regard to local institutions. Andhra Pradesh for example made two-child norm to contest the Panchayat election, which is not the case with other states. Bihar, Andhra Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh, Assam, Uttar Pradesh have stressed on the direct election of Sarpanch/Mukhiya, Sabhapathi etc. Interestingly states such as Gujarat, Punjab have created a Separate Panchayat Raj Service. Even states such as Punjab has given judicial powers to Gram Panchayats, which includes the establishment of Nyaya Panchayats by Manipur (The Hindu December 28 2001, Telegraph March 9 2005, P.N. Sankaran, 2003, 19).

Other than different features, different states or provinces have adopted different methods to enlarge the citizens' participation in recent years. One of the means is the use of media particularly audio media. Karnataka adopted a Kannada serial called “Namage Naave Wodeyaru” (We are our own masters), on the panchayat system with emphasis on gram Panchayats. Interestingly, Andhra Pradesh, which is known for e-governance, has become the first state or province to introduce e-Panchayats in Medak District. “All the functions of the Panchayat
are computerized and web enabled. (http://rural.nic.in/panchayatIT/e-panchayat.htm). Internet based services for Birth and Death Registrations, House Tax Assessment Collections, Trade Licenses, Old Age Pensions, Works Monitoring, Financial Accounting, MIS for Panchayat Administration are all being executed in the computerized e-Panchayat system. Additional services such as market prices and agricultural extension advice are also being provided to the citizens of the village from e-Panchayat”

The New Act created in total 27,79,906 local institutions comprising of Gram Panchayats, Intermediate Panchayats, and District Panchayats. It is presumed that citizens’ participation increases along with more number of local institutions. Take the case of Gram Panchayats—their number varies between 191 in Goa and 52,890 in Uttar Pradesh. However, the success stories lay in the how autonomous are they vis-à-vis the state units or how effectively they are providing or enlarging the spaces for socially marginalized groups to participate in the decision-making or political process. In fact, despite the large number of gram Panchayats in Uttar Pradesh, however the success stories of citizens’ participation not come from Uttar Pradesh rather from such states as Kerala, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh Andhra Pradesh, Rajasthan, Maharashtra, West Bengal and Tamil Nadu.

Social Differences and Individual autonomy:

India for that matter every country is known for social differences. Many of them have remained as retrenched social categories, who either were denied the spaces to enter into the larger domain of politics or the power structure. This is because of certain factors: one, important factor is the unequal distribution of property and the subsequent control over property or the land. This is the reason why there are vertical as well as horizontal differences.

The second important reason is the prevalence of caste system in India. This has once again denied large number of socially weak and retrenched categories to remain socially and politically backward.

Third reason is the larger ideology of gender bias. Some of the social categories were treated with disdain,

1) Women and social Harmony:

Until the beginning of 1992, when 73rd and 74th amendment was introduced to the Indian constitution, the power holders from women category largely came from the dominant caste or the land holding caste (http://mysite.wanadoo-members.co.uk/actionvillageindia/VM/StIndia20.htm). The 73rd
amendment reserved one third of all the seats in the rural Panchayats for women including seats of chair of the council. "This was a path breaking step for a country steeped in a deep-rooted patriarchal political system" (http://mysite.wanadoo-members.co.uk/actionvillageindia/VM/StIndia20.htm). For the first time out of 34 lakh more than 10,41,430 women got elected to different Panchayatw. Large number of them came from Uttar Pradesh(2,99024) followed by Madhya Pradesh(1,34368),Andhra Pradesh(74,019) and Bihar (70,400)Least number came from Sikkim (398). Mere numbering is not enough to understand the paradigm shift. Majority of women were illiterate, young and poor. In fact, percentage of illiterate who came to occupy the political power was 54. This trend began to spill after late 1990s. In 1995 when election was conducted the trend was different one, “more than 90 per cent of women contested the election for the first time against the seats reserved for them. In this context the prominent men made their wives or sisters or close relative contest the election against the reserved constituency- they started acting as defacto Sarpanch" (B.K.Chandrasheker: 2000). There were exception too; For example, Smt. Fatima Bi a Sarpanch from the Kurnool District of Andhra Pradesh who received UNDP Award in 1997. Nonetheless, slow but steady increase in the participation of women as “citizen” shattered some of the stereotypes as well as myths: that the women are passives, and are not interested in the public life. Most important myth is that it would feminize the corruption, arguing that women are now susceptible to corruption- on the contrary, it has lessened corruption at the local level. (http://www.pria.org/downloadfile/Synthesis%20Report.pdf #search='self%20help%20groups%20and%20panchayats')

Secondly, this has created spaces for competition among women. Earlier the notion of “docile women” who would not compete for political position has changed. In this competition for political spaces all the categories of women participated- rich, upper caste including the literate and socially retrenched categories.

Thirdly, it has reduced the spaces among genders thereby reduced the gender bias. This is apparent in the way the treatment towards the women have completely changed.

This does not mean that women are elected exclusively from the reserved constituencies. Women getting elected from the general constituencies are also increasing. This is apparent in such states as Karnataka wherein nearly forty percent women getting elected to local governments.

Women are getting elected more than the specified number or reserved percentage. This is not uniform. In Karnataka as we said earlier nearly forty percent, in a newly created state such as Uttarakhand, the women occupy 45 per

It is not the membership alone that counts, but also the position or the power that they hold. It differs with each state. In states such as Uttaranchal, of the 6,925 panchayat presidents 2,511 are women - this is quite a good number.

Women’s participation has brought new dimension in the development paradigm: One important paradigm is that it is now bringing in what is called gender budgeting. Interestingly for the first time it helped in bringing in gender sensitivity to the budgeting. Not all the states are at the forefront of gender budgeting. One of the important states is Kerala. It introduced gender issues in all phases of the process of decentralization, including the fact that it introduced and implemented (Mridula Epen, 2004) Women Component Plan-earmarking ten percent of budget for the purpose of women. (http://www.globalizacija.org.yu/doc_en/e0002rob.htm)

Stories of Women: success to “murder”

There is large number of women being empowered through the new amendment act. Let us take the following case:”http://www.indiatoggether.org/2004/may/wom-panchayat.htm). Geeta Rathore (44) belongs to Jamonia Talab gram panchayat, Sehore district, Madhya Pradesh. She was elected Sarpanch in 1995 from a reserved seat; but in 2000, the village people rewarded her for her admirable work by electing her again - this time to a non-reserved seat. From a humble housewife, Geeta has grown into a leader displaying political farsightedness - she has harnessed the collective energy of her Panchayat to renovate water tanks, build a school building, construct village roads, fight against domestic violence and atrocities against women, create environmental awareness, encourage afforestation and water management in her village”. This is one story. There are other side of the stories too; But in the same state, there was Sukhiya Bai - the tribal Sarpanch of Gubrail Panchayat in Betul district. A year ago, she died in a hospital in Bhopal with 80 per cent burns. Sukhiya tried to struggle against the corrupt officials who demanded a cut for releasing money for development work. Simultaneously, she was under pressure from the villagers who demanded the money due to them for their labour. She had even borrowed Rs 4,000 from a relative to pay the Panchayat secretary who had been demanding a bribe for releasing the money for a well that had been constructed by the villagers. Unable to bear the constant tension, she set fire to herself “There are women succumbing to the growing political conflicts “Leelavathi contested the Madurai municipal elections in 1996, promising to bring water to the ward. She was elected as counselor and within six months water came to the area. This threatened the mafia of the water tanker owners, who had a flourishing business in the area.
Within days of her victory to get water in the area, Leelavathi was murdered by those who lost their water business’.

Does it mean that all the states were in favour of enlarging women participation in one go? Had it been able to remove the stereotyped images of women and finally who really helped them to “empower”? These are some of the questions one needs to ask

In fact, not all the states in one go introduced thirty three per cent reservation to women. Some states took their own time to introduce reservation. For example Jammu and Kashmir introduced it in the year 2003 by amending Jammu and Kashmir Panchayati Raj Act, 1989 (The Hindu, Sept 20, 2003).

Secondly act itself has gone against women. There are states in India that has passed the bill, which specifies that person having more than two children cannot hold any power at the grass root level. Interestingly different states have also introduced the law that would remove the women from the membership of rural Panchayats if they deliver child while/when they hold office. It is here women becomes the victims

Thirdly, women also face violence, intimidation and harassment for challenging the male domination The society still yet to come to terms with the concept of women becoming or acting as “Sarpanch” – Chief of the rural local government.

Finally the multiple burden has not come down, they still has to carry on the household work along with the work of the community. - Village community.

However, one cannot over look the active support extended by different civil society groups to the women to become part of political process. This has helped in enlarging citizen participation too. These civil society groups, particularly Self Help Groups are aiming at bringing gender equality outlined under the Millennium Development Goals

(MDGs) set for 2015 by the United nations (UNDP: 2005:7). In many places they not only cooperate with the women to over come inhibition but also helps them to be a part of political process (Sabasti L.Raj and Edward Mathias, 1998). Interestingly these self help groups are now slowly but steadily replacing the cooperative movement also. This is apparent in Kerala wherein coir cooperatives are now slowly replaced by different Self Help Groups (The Hindu, December 26, 2004). In fact, “The case of the 1,44,182 self-help groups of women of the State Poverty Eradication Mission, 'Kudumbashree', which have utilized the opportunities provided by the decentralized local self-government institutions (LSGs) to the hilt, is a sparkling example” (The Hindu, Jan 2, 2005).
Self Help Groups are basically formed to encourage savings and credit activities, which is seen as overall development of women. It is here SHGs have moved beyond their mandated economic self-reliance to “participate in the over all affairs of society through Panchayati Raj. The SHG’s participation has now taken different forms: increasing the awareness by giving information; participating in the dialogue; activism as pressure groups and active interfacing with the local autonomous institutions. This has helped large number of women to participate in the decision-making of the local autonomous institutions. There are millions of SHGs in India now: they cannot be grouped under one category. Different states have different programmes for creating SHGs. Karnataka for example Stree Shakti Yojana, Andhra Pradesh had introduced Velugu programme (http://www.worldbank.org/wbi/reducingpoverty/docs/newpdfs/case-summ-India-WomenSelfHelpGroups.pdf#search=’women%20and%20help%20groups’). This is the reason why one can not overlook the importance of Self Help Group in enlarging citizen participation and also bringing in social harmony.

ii) Scheduled Castes and Tribes

Second important category that has been provided political spaces is the Scheduled Castes as well as Scheduled Tribes. These are the categories who have been left out of the political process for a long time. Despite affirmative actions of the state at different intervals by the Indian government, they have not been treated on par with other social categories. However, a complete change came about with the introduction of The Panchayat (Extension to Scheduled Area) Act of 1996 particularly to nine states in India wherein tribes have substantial presence. This act recognizes the traditional rights of the tribes over natural resources, respect their traditional institutions and provide them vast powers of self-governance. However, this act provides the lowest unit, Gram Sabha to approve all development plans, control all functionaries and institutions in social sectors as well as manage water bodies and other natural resources, have ownership of minor forest produce, prevent alienation of land, manage village markets and resolve disputes. The village assembly and Panchayat are required to be consulted prior to any move to acquire land or grant any mineral concessions”. It also provided that at least 50% of the members in Panchayat are tribals and that Chairperson should always be a tribal. This has helped to a large extent the tribals to enter into the political domain. This does not mean that there was no resistance to their participation. In fact their number has substantial presence in different states. In total 3,32,979 STs have joined the local autonomous institutions, which comes to around 12 per cent. Their presence however is varied-Madhya Pradesh tops the list with 1,12,938 followed by Chattisgarh(66,933). Interestingly Punjab has no presence of Scheduled Tribes. In non “tribal states” such as in Karnataka their representation has crossed ten percent(10.7)

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Similar is the case of Scheduled Castes in India. On the one hand it has led to paradigm shift- from the top down to bottom up approach-, mean while one can not over look the stereotypes still persisting and the attempts at scuttling citizens’ participation. Let us give two instances. First instance is pertaining to Jharkhand. Here some areas have been declared as Scheduled areas although non-tribals constitute majority categories. This is the reason why non-tribals are opposing tribals occupying important positions such as Chairman. Second instance is Karnataka. Here a Dalit lady even though elected to Panchayats has not been allowed to construct a drainage, which passes through the Upper Caste colony. This opposition came about simply on the ground that member concerned belongs to the Dalit or retrenched social category. Such instances are numerous. It is here the local autonomy or citizens’ participation as power holders is seriously curtailed through the means of threats, violence, and “open auctioning of posts”. There are other ways of restricting or scuttling citizen participation. This is apparent at the larger level too including provincial or state level. However there has a substantial presence of Scheduled castes after the amendment to Indian constitution- in total there are 5,29,152 SCs in local autonomous institutions which comes to around 19.0 percent. Their number varies from zero (Goa and Arunachala Pradesh) to 1,191,950 (Uttara Pradesh) in 2006. However in terms of highest percentage Himachal Pradesh topped the list with 32.9 per cent followed by Punjab (31.2)

**Attempts to Scuttle Local Autonomy and Citizen Participation:**

There are many states, which have not implemented the Acts in its entirety-for example many states still yet to introduce Ward Committees that would have minimized the social conflicts. This is true of the case of District Planning Board too. This is apparent in the following table:

**Status of District Planning Committees (Art.243-ZD)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S.No.</th>
<th>State/UTs</th>
<th>State of Constitution Of DPCs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Andhra Pradesh</td>
<td>Not yet Constituted. However, an ordinance has been issued by the Govt. of AP in Dec, 2003 for constitution of DPCs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Arunachal Pradesh</td>
<td>Not Constituted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Assam</td>
<td>Not Constituted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Bihar</td>
<td>37 districts out of 38 districts constituted on adhoc basis. Chairman ZP in the chairperson of DPCs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Chattisgarh</td>
<td>Constituted. Minister is the Chairperson of DPC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Goa</td>
<td>Constituted. President of ZP Chairperson of DPC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No.</td>
<td>State</td>
<td>Status</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----</td>
<td>----------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Gujarat</td>
<td>Not Constituted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>Haryana</td>
<td>Constituted only in 6 districts out of 12. Minister is the Chairperson of DPC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>Himachal Pradesh</td>
<td>Constituted. Panchayat Elections yet to be held</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>Karnataka</td>
<td>Yes, District in charge Ministers are Chairperson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>Jharkhand</td>
<td>Yes, in 2 Districts out of 4. Adhyaksha, DP is the Chairperson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.</td>
<td>Kerala</td>
<td>Only in 26 Districts. Minister is the Chairperson of DPC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13.</td>
<td>Madhya Pradesh</td>
<td>Constituted. Chairperson of DP is Chairman of DPC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14.</td>
<td>Maharashtra</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15.</td>
<td>Manipur</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16.</td>
<td>Orissa</td>
<td>Constituted. Minister is Chairperson of DPC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17.</td>
<td>Punjab</td>
<td>Only in 26 Districts. Minister is the Chairperson of DPC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18.</td>
<td>Rajasthan</td>
<td>Constituted. Chairperson of DP is Chairman of DPC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19.</td>
<td>Sikkim</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20.</td>
<td>Tamil Nadu</td>
<td>Yes, Chairperson, DP is Chairperson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21.</td>
<td>Tripura</td>
<td>Not Constituted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22.</td>
<td>Uttar Pradesh</td>
<td>Not Constituted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23.</td>
<td>Uttaranchal</td>
<td>Constituted. Minister is Chairperson of DPC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24.</td>
<td>West Bengal</td>
<td>Constituted. Chairperson of DP is Chairperson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25.</td>
<td>A &amp; N Islands</td>
<td>Constituted. Chairman of DP is Chairperson of DPC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26.</td>
<td>Chandigarh</td>
<td>Not Constituted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27.</td>
<td>D &amp; N Haveli</td>
<td>Constituted. Chairman, DP is Chairperson of DPC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28.</td>
<td>Daman &amp; Diu</td>
<td>Constituted. Chairman, DP is Chairperson of DPC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30.</td>
<td>Pondicherry</td>
<td>Not Constituted</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Secondly, there is no uniformity in the application of Acts. One can divide the states into two categories: one, those who are at the forefront in applying the spirits of Panchayati Raj including different Programmes: Karnataka, Kerala, Maharashtra, Rajasthan, West Bengal for example are at the forefront and had taken the steps to strengthen Gram Sabha and empower Ward Sabhas, etc. They have allowed more than the specified number of women to take part in the political process. More than that they have expanded the local autonomy-fiscal as well as political.

Thirdly there are attempts to check mate the local autonomy by making them to depend upon the of state legislature. Even though it is stated that the local autonomous institutions can have autonomy to decide 29 issues (11 Schedule), however, it does not mean absolute freedom to the local institutions. These powers have to be parted by the state legislature. Very few states are prepared to give up total control over all the subjects. Only such state as Assam, Chattisgarh, Rajasthan, Haryana, Tamil Nadu, Tripura, West Bengal, Karnataka, (J.S.Sadanand: 2004:XII) parted all the functions along with funds to the local autonomous institutions. Even big state with highest number of local autonomous institutions such as Maharashtra(18), Punjab(7)Gujarat(15) Uttar Pradesh (12) Andhra Pradesh (17) Gujarat (15), Uttaranchal(14)Madhya Pradesh (23) etc have parted with less number of subjects to the local autonomous institutions. This is where one finds the issues of local autonomy still remaining incomplete and slowly being defeat.

Fourthly, local autonomy or citizens’ participation is slowly being denied through other means. One such means is to postpone the election on flimsy grounds. Recently Haryana State amended the Panchayati bill, which became an act, however, its main aim was to advance the elections four months. Many states such as Assam, Bihar, MP, Uttar Pradesh, Orissa have either tried to curtail or extend the tenure of local institutions. In states such as Bihar, Jammu and Kashmir and Pondicherry elections were held after more than twenty-two years. Similarly in Gujarat the election was postponed for three months due to communal riots. In NCT Delhi, Panchayati Raj system is under super cession since January 1990. Karnataka did try to postpone the elections, but in vain. However there are attempts to scuttle the power of the Gram Sabha, directly elect the Sarpanch in Karnataka. All these have come in the way of enlarging the participation by the citizens in the local autonomous institutions.

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However one cannot deny the fact that the autonomy of the institutions is also affected by the political interference including the conversions of institutions into Political Panchayats. In the process the citizen’s participation has been identified with, or become part of political ideology of the parties concerned. This has affected the political/financial autonomy of the institutions, along with the fact that it also affects the very functioning of the local autonomous institutions. It is here, “the Panchayats have failed to deliver the services of social justice and economic growth” (Raj Kumar Siwach:2005:12)

**Shifting paradigms:**

To increase and to enlarge the citizen participation and local autonomy, a new thinking is slowly emerging. Seven Round Tables have been convened which have dealt the issues of Activity Mapping, including the gender budgeting, evolving common electoral role for all levels of elections etc. Most important is the new role assigned to the Panchayats: they now can enter the electricity sector both as franchises of power distributors as also in decentralized generation of power. they have been made to cover such wide ranging problems as asset reform, land reforms to enhance “land base for the rural poor, augmenting credit inflows, promoting increases in small farm productivity, promoting cooperative farming” etc. However the most dangerous aspect lies in making the panchayats responsible of “contract farming, promoting company farming, corporate farming” and also “land reforms” (Ministry of Panchayati Raj:2006). This would take away the local autonomy as well, particularly because these measures would allow the global capital to enter into the domain of Panchayats and in the process takes away the already shrinking autonomy. The case of Plachimada, (against Coca Cola in Kerala), Nagarguna in Mangalore, Chamalapura in Mysore (against Thermal Project), Tadadi in Karnataka (against Thermal Project) are some of the best examples reflecting the shrinking powers/autonomy of the Panchayats - they have become ineffective in the midst of big capitalist entering rural economy. This is the reason why the danger to the local autonomy and also to the citizens’ participation comes from the outside the realm of rural panchayats- it lies in global/western capital which aims at controlling the rural economy and the cultural practices.

It is in this context conclusions that James Manor had drawn about India is essential (http://www.grc-exchange.org/info_data/record.cfm?id=681). He has identified three important trends growing from within vis-à-vis the local autonomy of the institutions.

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“Many governments are unwilling to devolve adequate powers and resources to local bodies, thus stifling constructive developmental outcomes and limiting the potential of elected local bodies.

Governments may take back powers and resources from local bodies, often in response to pressure from bureaucrats and legislators discontented with the loss of former powers.

The proliferation of often donor driven and usually single sector ‘user committees’ alongside local councils has often damaged decentralization”.

In the midst of all these claims and counter claims, one should ask the question as to whether the Panchayati Raj institutions will survive by providing spaces for increased citizen participation as well as local autonomy or develop tendency towards imminent collapse (George Mathew: 1994). It is true that despite ambiguities and hesitant in application, participation of citizens in the local autonomous institutions have increased drastically over the past couple of years. Their participation is also supported or backed by the growth of large number of civil society groups – latter are acting as the site of democratic spaces. Interestingly citizen’s participation is no more confined to entrenched social categories alone- now large number of marginalized, voiceless, retrenched social categories are entering into political-power domain. Given this emerging scenario it is but natural that the local autonomous institutions would survive, however they have to cope with the global capital- given the strength of global capital, the local autonomous institutions would definitely face the crisis - the crisis of existence and identity. The recent attempt to establish series of Special economic Zones (SEZs) and growing concern to introduce contract farming at the grass root level definitely sharpen the crisis. All these does not mean the imminent collapse of Panchayati Raj Institutions. They would take different forms: they would become the centers of oppositions to global capital, western capitalism. In other words Panchayati Raj will mantle new role in the changing context- mantle of resisting, mantle of opposing the global capital. It is in these oppositions Panchayati Raj would emerge as centers of new democracy in India.

Notes and References
It is here India’s leading intellectual Prabhat Patnaik differentiate World Bank advocated decentralization and the decentralization advocated by the radicals or the leftist particularly Left Front Government in Kerala, He argues that “decentralization” agenda of the Left is a means of carrying class-struggle forward, of buttressing the class-strength of the rural
poor by developing institutions where they can, in principle, assert themselves directly and hence more effectively, the “decentralization” promoted by the imperialist agencies has precisely the opposite objective, of blunting class-struggle, of encouraging a scenario of “obedient-and-suppliant-villagers-being-patronized-by-NGOs”, and of substituting the concept of the “Rights” of the people by the concept of “Self-Help” See Prabhat Patnaik, Decentralized Planning Vs World Bank Style Decentralization: A Theoretical Note, http://www.networkideas.org/eco/apr2004/eb15_Decentralized_Planning.htm

Different parties also endorsed such arguments. For example, a rightist party like BJP argues that, “Panchayats have existed in India for almost as long as India existed. They are the living proof that democracy is not imported into India; but rather it is an inseparable part of India’s civilization heritage. Pandit Deendayal Upadhyay used to emphasize that decentralization is the key to both healthy democracy and for the socio-economic development. This thinking is rooted in the Indian ethos of regarding a Panch, of a biradari or of the village as Parameshvar” See BJP, National Executive Meeting, April 13 2002, Goa, http://www.bjp.org/NEM/panch.htm

http://www.thp.org/sai00/india/panchayat.htm


http://indiachoice.nic.in/coiweb/amend/amend/73.htm


http://www.indiatogether.org/2004/may/wom-panchayat.htm

This has been the argument of large number of scholar. One important study tries to make the gender analysis. See Mridula Epen Report on Gender Analysis of Select Gram (Village) Panchayat Plan-Budgets in Trivendrum District, Kerala, Consultation on Impact of Macroeconomic Policies on Women, November 25 2004 New Delhi

George Mathew, Local Governments help deepen Democracy in India, See www.issin.org


Nyaya Panchayat is now defended given the number of litigation before the courts. There are more than twenty million cases pending before different courts in India. Nyaya Panchayat not only brings the judiciary to the doorsteps but also it will lighten the burden of the judiciary. They have a long history dating back to hoary past. They were the primary functions of “Panchayats” “Jati”, “Janapada” and “gram” Kerala has a plan to

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establish Nyaya Panchayat, see The Hindu December 28 2001, Telegraph March 9 2005 and also P.N. Sankaran, Participatory Justice and Human Rights Protection in Little Democracies A Pilot Study Kerala Research Programme on Local Development, Centre For Development Studies, Thiruvananthapuram, 2003 p.19

http://rural.nic.in/panchayatIT/e-panchayat.htm

http://mysite.wanadoo-members.co.uk/actionvillageindia/VM/StIndia20.htm

There are many studies to understand the corruption vis-à-vis women. One such institution is Women’s Studies Centre at Delhi University, See http://www.pria.org/downloadfile/Synthesis%20Report.pdf #search='self%20help%20groups%20and%20panchayats'

Women participation also increased due to the efforts of civil society groups, some of the groups are aiming at fifty percent. One such group is Rural Litigation and Empowerment Kendra, a non-governmental organisation (NGO) that works with communities in Uttaranchal. See http://www.un-instraw.org/revista/hypermall/alltickets/en/0009.html.

However studies conducted in some village Panchayats argues that “the conscious efforts under the decentralized regime to recognize the market and domestic roles of women and the gender differences in needs and interests, remained largely at the level of rhetoric in policy making and disappeared at the level of implementation”, See Mridula Epen Report on Gender Analysis of Select Gram (Village) Panchayat Plan-Budgets in Trivendrum District, Kerala, in Consultation on Impact of Macroeconomic Policies on Women, November 25 2004, New Delhi.

India is not the only country to introduce gender budgeting. More than fifty countries have adopted gender budgeting. Australia is the first country that introduced a women’s budget in 1985. Tanzania adopted in 1993 http://www.globalizacija.org.yu/doc_en/e0002rob.htm

http://www.indiatogether.org/2004/may/wom-panchayat.htm

Interestingly Jammu division, there were only 246 women sarpanchs against 20,548 panchas and 2,700 sarpanchs in the State. See The Hindu, September 20 2003

There are arguments stating that there are conflicts between NGOs as well as the Panchayati Raj Institutions, See, Sabasti L. Raj and Edward Mathias, People’s Power and Panchayati Raj: Theory and Practice, Institute of Social Action, 1998.


The Hindu, January 2, 2005.


http://www.grc-exchange.org/info_data/record.cfm?id=681

**Glossary**

Panchayat Panchayat has been defined as “means an institution (by whatever name called) of self-government constituted under article 243B, for the rural areas”

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Sampoorna Grameena Rozgar Yojana (Complete Village Employment Scheme) This is meant to provide additional jobs including food security and durable community. This particular scheme has the special emphasis on women, Scheduled Castes and Tribes etc.

SGSY Swarnjayanit Gram Swarozgar Yojana This is meant to bring poor families above the poverty line by providing them income-generating assets through a mix of bank credit and government subsidy. However, Panchayats are supposed to approve list of Below the Poverty Line Families

PMGSY Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana. This Scheme aims at providing connectivity to all unconnected habitations in the rural areas with a population of more than 500 persons through good All-weather roads by the end of the Tenth Plan

IAY Indira Awaas Yojana. This scheme provides assistance for the construction of houses mainly to the BPL rural households belonging primarily to SCs/STs and freed bonded Labour categories.

PMGY Pradhan Mantri Gramoddaya Yojana It aims at providing Basic Minimum Services including “Rural Shelter”

Credit Cum Subsidy Scheme: This Scheme targets rural families having annual income upto Rs.32,000/-. While subsidy is restricted to Rs.10,000/-, the maximum loan amount can be availed upto Rs.40,000/- under this scheme

Samagra Awaas Yojana: This is a comprehensive Housing Scheme meant to ensure integrated provision of shelter, sanitation and drinking water

Annapurna The Annapurna Scheme aims at providing food security to the senior citizens who though eligible have remained uncovered under the National Old Age Pension Scheme

Watershed Development Programmes Under DPAP And DDP: The Drought Prone Areas Programme (DPAP), Desert Development Programme (DDP) and Integrated Wasteland Development Programme (IWP) are being implemented on watershed basis and aim at drought proofing and controlling desertification by regeneration of depleted natural resource base. All these three Programmes were brought under the Guidelines for Watershed Development with effect from 1.4.1995.

ARWSP Accelerated Rural Water Supply Programme This scheme envisages providing access to safe drinking water to all rural habitations of the country.

CRSP Central Rural Sanitation Programme. This programme aims at improving the general quality of life in rural areas, including controlling incidence of water sanitation related diseases

Swajaldhara This programme aims at providing Community-based Rural Drinking Water Supply