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POPULAR PARTICIPATION :
A CONCEPTUAL ANALYSIS
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POLITICAL PARTICIPATION: A CONCEPTUAL ANALYSIS

Political participation refers to a series of voluntary activities that have a bearing on the political process involving selection of representatives and/or public policy for sake of administration. Democracy in particular is based on popular participation and virtually there cannot be any democracy without popular participation.

However, political participation is an essential ingredient of every political system. The political power in a society may be monopolized, but the incumbent political authority is very keen to ensure some amount of political participation of the ruled. The reason is quite evident, involvement of the citizenry in the affairs of the state ensures a sense of stability and security of the ruler and grants legitimacy to the outside world. Any society with participatory deprivation has eroded with explosive outcomes. History has incorporated political participation as a manner of social evolution in every system, be it a democracy or otherwise.

Political participation means the participation of the citizenry in matters of politics and the grade of loyalty determines the political development of the state. The pre-requisites of the political participation are awareness, interest and attitude of the citizenry and necessary socio-cultural factors and outcomes may be political demonstration against an unjust public policy, effective governance, decentralized administration and planning, effective peripheral development, so on and so forth.

Political participation and political development run hand in hand. Political participation is the basis and political development is the outcome that results from interaction with the existing political system. Political awareness, interest and even effective political demonstration by mass is a clue and stimulus for political development of the nation. Popular participation is the milestone of democratic process and success story of democracy.
Participation of people in governance can be positive or negative. The positive ways may be electoral or non-electoral. The electoral participation may be as a candidate, or member of the peer group in the electioneering campaign or even as a voter. The non-electoral may be participation in governance in any of the ways of governance of the local, state and / or centre in taking part as consumer of the system, giving a note of satisfaction or dissatisfaction, suggesting some remedial measure or any other ways of being involved in the system. The negative political participation often refers to strikes, hartals, dharanas or bandhs to any political or administrative decision is in no way negative. Rather these are strong participatory factor in democratic process that expresses people’s tone. But the last category, the political apathy or absolute withdrawal in a democratic system is really a democratic suicide without voice of life in the system of demand and enjoy that prevails in democracy.

The process of mass participation means a diffusion of decision-making and shaping the decisions citizen oriented with their choices. In some of the new states participation by all its citizens have not been successful in expressing their votes, but have essentially become a response to the contemporary elite manipulation. It should be recognised that even such limited participation has a role to play in nation building since it represents a means of creating loyalties and a new feeling of national identity. There are many forms of participation and democracy is the form of government that encourages maximum participation in governmental processes. Participation does not mean mere exercise of political rights like franchise by people. It means the active involvement of the citizens in decision-making and influences the decision-makers of the government.

According to the democratic theory of political participation, citizens are rational, independent and interested political entities capable of expressing their opinion regarding the persons aspiring for holding offices and also competent in electing some persons who deal with the policies of government in a way conducive to the
interest of the mass. Perhaps the most pervasive participation is simply living in a
democratic community where all governmental affairs are broadcasted in mass
media. In such a situation authorities must project government's attitude and must
appeal the civil society. Thus the great public in any democracy serve as sounding
board for public policy deliberation and discussion. Even a passive participation is a
constructive part of democratic process. The most important participatory activities in
democracy are voting at the polls, supporting the candidate in election campaigns
and as peer group. Personally communicating with legislators, participating in
political party activity and thus acquiring a claim on legislators and engaging in
habitual dissemination of political opinions through word of mouth communications to
other citizens. Lester Milbrath brings these activities under three categories. Firstly,
the gladiatorial activities that include a number of party activists whose active
association with political parties keeps them engaged in a series of direct party
activities like holding party offices, fighting the elections as party candidates, raising
party funds, attending party meetings and joining the party campaigns. Second, the
transitional activities include attending party meetings of party supporters or party
sympathizers or just as neutral but attentive listeners, making contributions to the
party funds and coming in contact of public officials or party personnel. Lastly, the
spectator activities include voting, influencing others to vote in a particular way,
making and joining a political discussion, exposing one to political stimuli and
wearing a button or showing a sticker. The following factors like availability of
information, opportunities for the participants, interest of the participants;
psychological satisfaction and material benefits of participants are the facilitators for
popular participation.

The intensity of political participation is very high in modern stable democracies
because of stable system of economy, degree of development, high social status,
and the level of education. But according to Lipset, the high level of participation
could always be treated as good for democracy. It may indicate the decline of social cohesion. Some other political theorists are of the opinion that when majority of the people in a society are contended, participation is marginal. This should be taken as a favourable rather than unfavourable sign as it indicates stability and consensus within the society and also absence of broad cleavages.

On the basis of political participation, a society may be either a participant modern society with large scale involvement of people in politics or a non-participant traditional society, where a limited number of people enter into the political process. Traditional democratic theory generally regards participation by the individual in political activity as a virtue in the own right. Participation has been characterized as a civic duty, as a sign of political health and the best method of ensuring that one's private interests are not neglected. From Aristotle to John Dewey, political philosophers have extolled popular participation as a source of vitality and creative energy as a defense against tyranny and as a means of enacting collective wisdom. By involving people in the affairs of the State, participation should promote stability and order in the system. Participation gives an opportunity to express one's own point of view and to secure the greatest good for the greatest number. Some philosophers have claimed that participation benefits the participants as well as the larger community. It provides citizens a sense of dignity and value, alerts both the rulers and ruled to their duties and responsibilities, and facilitates broader political understanding.

In Aristotle's *Polis* he explained that 'Polis' is an organisation (from Greek's point of view) which is the gift of God. The Polis was inseparable from the city. France, not Paris, is the State. But Athens, not Attica, was the Polis. It was small about the size of a small English country. Only three Polis had more than 20,000 citizens - Athens, Syracuse and Acragal. All the citizens are cultured. They desired to live in the leisure of free and abstemious men, and they wanted a sufficient number of citizens to make
cultural life feasible but not too many to make direct participation in government impossible. They strongly agreed with Aristotle that "ten men are too few for a city; a hundred thousand are too many".

It proves that Greek City status promotes limited political participation, for the management of governmental activities and cultural life. The sovereignty of Polis was so fundamental to it that the Greeks never formed a nation - the very idea of the Polis being as much opposed to it as the idea of caste in India. The better is the enemy of the good, and in all that makes life thrilling and whole the Greek was convinced that he had the best. Its size and sovereignty make the Polis the most intimate and intense form of political grouping that has ever existed. Its impact upon its citizens was much more direct than the impact of a great modern State can ever hope to be. This is obviously so in a democratic Polis where the citizen was a member of the Sovereign Assembly, where he might be chosen by lot to be chancellor of the exchequer, where he could reckon on holding office every so often, where he might find himself in command of a campaign as one Athenian leather merchant did after expressing trenchant criticism of the conduct of operations. Aristotle said that man is a political animal, he meant that it is the characteristics of man to live in a Polis. The Polis also explained the internal problem of the State that was 'Stasis' or 'vulgent faction'. The practice of reservation was practiced for tribal warfare. From Platonic State point of view the philosopher-kings are the active participants in State management. The artisans or the producer class are the second class citizens and they are the symbol of passive participants towards the State management. In the Greek administration, if the soldiers are negligent towards the duty they lose their civil right. Plato stressed on proper leadership, proper production and proper provision for Good State.

As per the Anarchists, the individual enjoys unlimited freedom and voluntary cooperation in sharing of State power. They suggested a completely decentralized organisation of society. The Pluralists are convinced that there are many levels of
human groupings that influence the working of the government. They are concerned about the means of making political systems more responsive to the needs and demands of the individuals and groups. The Marxists view the State as a means of perpetuating dominance of one class of people over others. Bentham and John Stuart Mill stress on the number of people who actually have or should have power in a State for responsible government. For adequate involvement of the people, they distinguish between the 'rule of one', 'rule of few' and 'rule of many'. The same reflection also observed in Aristotle's classification of government (cycle of government, monarchy to tyranny, tyranny to aristocracy, aristocracy to oligarchy, oligarchy to polity and polity to democracy). Almost all political thinkers discussed about political participation for citizen welfare and responsible government through their ideology. The *laissez faire* theory advocated for greater autonomy for the socioeconomic processes and for functions of the State. State, which governs the least is the best. In some way or other the *laissez faire* theory promotes the participation of people in management of the State.

The political participation can be defined as "those voluntary activities by which members of society share in the selection of rulers and directly or indirectly, in the formation of public policy" by McClosky. According to Almond and Powell political participation "as the involvement of members of the society in the decision-making process of the system". According to David Eston, political participation refers to individual's political acts constitute inputs into the process of decision-making for territorial community. Democratic ideal encourages political interest and participation on the part of the citizens. Traditional democratic theory generally regards participation by the individual in political activity as a virtue in its own right. Participation has been seen as a civic duty, as a sign of political health, as the best method of ensuring that one's private interests are not neglected and as a *sine qua non* of a democracy.
Developmental History of Political Participation:

The history of political participation by citizens in the past can be known from the accounts of democracies of ancient world like Greece, Rome, Switzerland, etc. The Greek city states could encourage the entire body of their free citizens because of the small size of the states, to develop acquaintances and interest in the local politics and granted them political rights and privileges. A detailed account of citizen's participation in Athenian democratic states and also the merits-demerits of such participation is found in the writings of Plato and Aristotle. The politicians and other persons engaged in the service of the State were considered as men of high prestige. There were public assemblies in which the members had the right to vote, to hold office, and many other privileges normally enjoyed by the members of political society. The political consciousness was developed with a view to make the identification of the people with the community prefect and it was based on the customs and ideals of Greek society. In Athens every adult male citizen irrespective of their economic status was a member of the general assembly of the citizens in which all power was vested. The citizens also enjoyed the right to act as members of judicial bodies. Some of the Roman emperors ruled over vast territories but the participation of the citizens in political affair of the Roman Empire was limited to the city of Rome. The popular assembly of Rome, unlike the general assembly of Athens, enjoyed only some specific powers in relation to the laws of war and peace. It also enjoyed the judicial power and acted as a court for imposing penalties. The Executive function of the assembly was limited to bestowing offices to persons concerned suitable for the same. However, certain legal concepts of Romans, like the concept of natural law, individual rights and law of the people, later on contributed to the development of democratic theory. The practice of direct democracy, which is treated as the ideal form of people's participation in politics, has long been known in Switzerland. Traces of pure democracy still remain and some of the Swiss cantons hold open air meetings in the field or public square of the capital city every year to
pass laws and elect their officials. In case of the USA the earliest evidence of complete participation of people in politics is found in New England Town meetings. The towns and the villages were the units which conducted the affairs of the government in this region and every citizen was allowed to attend the meetings called in the town for that purpose. Those meetings ensured direct participation of the citizen and aroused their interest for solution of various problems related to public life and the government. The town meetings are no longer much effective in conducting the business of government because the conditions of modern living have made them obsolete.

The transition of states from monarchy to democracy was marked by an increasing participation of people in politics. In countries like England, France, America, India, etc. people revolted against the centralization of all power in the hands of the monarchs. In England the Puritans under the leadership of Oliver Cromwell revolted against the monarchy and demanded more power of participation for the people. The French Revolution of 1789 can be mentioned as one of the major event in the history of the world, which helped in the growth of democracy. This revolution also proved that the voice of the people is supreme in the matter of government. If people desire they can change the form of government. The American people, particularly those of Boston, also used the methods of meetings, demonstrations, riots, pamphlets, etc. as vehicles of people's participation in politics when Samuel Adams organised demonstration against His Majesty's Government of Great Britain. In India, People became interested in political matters after the National Liberation Movement was launched by the Indian National Congress, under the leadership of Gandhi to make the country free from the British rule. The massive participation of people of India could make it a success. This Freedom Movement was unprecedented in history in the sense of the peaceful manner it resorted to and it proved the effectiveness of the non-violent method like Satyagraha and Ahimsa in a political revolution.
Concept of Democratic Decentralization and Popular Participation:

Local governments are infra-sovereign geographical sub-division of a sovereign national or a quasi-sovereign (Federated) State. According to Shorter Oxford Dictionary, 'infra' is defined as 'denoting', 'below', or 'beneath' in respect of status or condition. It is also defined as Denoting 'within' geographic units contained with sovereign nation. Local Governments give institutional legitimacy to local interests and they provide an area-based component for a pluralistic society.

The exact meaning of the term decentralization is the process of transferring the functions from a central government to the local units such distribution of authority and power. This is in a horizontal rather than hierarchical manner. Decentralization does not merely denote division of the functions between the state government and the local bodies. Each one is independent of the other and also includes devolution of the state's functions on local bodies, the later discharging them subject to the constitutional responsibility of the State.

As regards the functions devolved on the local bodies, they are fully free to decide the priorities between the various activities and the suitability of the areas in which they should be undertaken. The fundamental purpose of such efforts is to develop local leadership to assume higher responsibilities and to serve the people with maximum efficiency and economy.

According to Appleby, "Democratic decentralization appears to suggest that decentralization axiomatically enhances democracy". In fact very little developmental activity can be visualized until effective decentralization has taken place. Proponents of decentralization point out three basic virtues namely participation, responsiveness and efficiently. Decentralization embraces both the processes of devolution and deconcentration. The motivation for decentralization does not lie upon coercion but upon its ability to enable the people to have a feel for power, i.e., the sharing of power in matters relating to the multifaceted development
of their own area. The importance of decentralization lies in the fact that centralization breeds bureaucratization which, in turn, develops the initiative of the people, curbs people's participation and slows down the rapid pace for economic growth.

Local authorities are involved in projects that have distinct political goals like promoting popular participation in public affairs, those that were designed to spur economic development, and others that were clearly intended to bring about radical social change. They are charged with equal distribution of the fruits of economic and social development uniformly throughout the country.

Three strongest arguments for local government as a democratic institution are on the basis of participation. V. Kanesalingam points out the three distinct advantages of decentralization of power and functions and popular participation at local levels, as follows. First, the people will have a better understanding of what the government proposes. Second, the central Government's development activities can be made more realistic by involving the people locally in important decisions and finally, popular participation in increasing the likelihood that services and amenities, which are established, will be maintained and even expanded.

In democracy, there is a significant but natural administration-citizen interfaces because the support and the consent of the governed are a prerequisite for the sustenance of representative government. The bulk of the citizens who are voters and beneficiaries of state services are keener to get services supplied than the subtle aspects of how he gets it. The government is more democratic when citizens participate in its day-to-day work with a communication of what is necessary and what is not.

The impact of popular participation in government affairs is the greatest at the local level. Here the public utility services are most meaningful to the citizen. Full benefits of participation are more likely with a political commitment and strategy for
participatory development, ensuring greater involvement of various members of the local majority in their own development. Community involvement and collective efforts for solving neighborhood problems are the first step towards realisation of longer goals of democracy and development. Popular participation through local government serves threefold purpose of development:

- Developing administrative capability,
- Determining programme priorities and
- Bringing reforms in administration.

Out of the three major functions of local government, recognised by the Layfield Committee, the participatory function (other two functions are liberty functions and efficient provision of service functions) is a training for later service at higher levels and diffusing power among the populace. It is a potent self-education and means of breeding harmonious local commitment. Thus political education has a central place in democratic reasoning. Thornhill points out that local government's vital contribution is that it is a political institution by which people share in government and resolve their differences.

Pantere Brick argues that participation is vital to democracy since people appreciate and tolerate each other's views and learn the art of practical politics. Local Government teaches some primary democratic virtues like justness of one's claim and the need to select from among the competing claims those that are to be given priority. True democracy begins with when common people are convinced that the principal activities of the State are geared to the promotion of their wellbeing and when they feel obliged to participate in and co-operate with the efforts of the later for the fulfillment of the set goals.

It starts from the 'grassroots' and will never flourish and prosper if imposed from above. Participation may take many forms, it can beat varying levels of intensity, and persist over long or short periods of time. On local government, most citizens will be involved, not as candidates or party or group activists, but through the ballot box.
Local elections provide regular opportunities for expressing consumer satisfaction or dissatisfaction. They also ensure that issues will be aired, and that citizens will learn or relearn, democratic process, so reinforcing their commitment to the system.\textsuperscript{29}

\textit{Participation at Grassroots:}

Participation is an essential part of human growth that is the development of self-confidence, pride, initiative, creativity, responsibility, cooperation. When development is intended by a process of decentralization, participation of the beneficiaries, i.e. the citizens at grassroots are all that is desired. Otherwise, the efforts will go in vain or may not be of any utility for them or it may so happen that all the finances provided for the development of the grassroots may be fraudulently consumed.

The process of taking charge of own lives and solving own problems is the essence of development. Participation by the people in the organisations that govern some of the basic problems is a basic human right and essential for realignment of political power in favour of disadvantaged groups and for social and economic development.

Rural development strategy can realise their full potential only through the motivation, active involvement and organisation at the grassroots with special facilities for the disadvantaged, in conceptualizing and designing policies and programmes and in creating administrative, social and economic institutions including cooperative and other voluntary form of organisation for implementing and evaluating them.

Participation has become a catchword in participatory development. Participation, if it is to really realise the people's own creative energies for development, must be much more than the mere mobilization of labour forces or the coming together to hear about predetermined plans. Participation must be more than a policy statement; there must be a genuine commitment to encourage participation in all aspects and at all levels. According to Prof. Orlando Fals-Borda participation is a philosophical
approach to development rather than a policy. Participation is a process in which the rural poor become themselves aware of their own state, the socio-economic reality around them, problems that surround them, causes and remedial pathways and their possible role for amelioration of their ailments. This process of awakening is a process of transformation and individual comes to have harmonious thinking for development all around the locality. The individual becomes participant, feels that it is a basic need, he learns by doing. Plans are made, action is initiated, results are analysed and target is reached. This learning process excites further action and the success story of participation comes up. This is non-ending and new areas are touched. The result is all around development.

Mohammed Anisur Rahman maintains that participation is a process whose course cannot be determined from outside. It is generated by the continuing phase of the people, by a rhythm of collective action and reflection. Participation is a continuous educative process - a continuous and progressive interest and involvement. The British researcher, Oakley and Marsden (1984) point out that until recently the notion of participation as a means to achieving development has dominated development practice. According to them, the two main vehicles for implementing of this notion of participation were:

(A) Community development programmes that were aimed at preparing the rural population to collaborate with government development plans, and

(B) The establishment of formal organisations (cooperatives, farmers' associations, etc.), which were to provide the structure in touch of the local people in the rural area and also with their choice and voice.
Oakley and Marsden believe that participation is an end in itself and is the unavoidable consequence of the process of empowering and liberation. Participation is concerned with achieving power, the power to influence the decisions affecting one's livelihood. According to United Nations Reassert Institute for Social Development (UNRISD), "participation involves organised efforts to increase control over resources and regulative institutions in given social situations, on the part of groups and movements of those hitherto excluded from such control, participation in this context leads to greater control by the poor over those own life situation. Through the acquisition of knowledge and awareness they come to understand the etiology of their poverty and come to a position to think, act and mobilize the available resources to remedy. According Rahman, participation will develop in different ways in specific situations dependent upon the problems faced by specific groups of the poor and the specific factors inhibiting their development.

The poor need to be approached at a specific group and their economic situation must be improved if participation is to be successful. This will in most situations automatically imply conflict with better to do elements in the highly differentiated rural societies. There is a complex relationship between self-reliance and the need for external assistance. Participation requires self-reliance and is surrendered by dependence. However, promotion of participation in an initially non-participatory, dependent scenario often requires catalytic assistance at the very onset. This dilemma must be touched with extreme sensitivity if the process is not to come to a point of new dependence.

Yet it is afraid to presume that the organisation again fall a prey to few power lovers and rich and the poor still stay away from its central core. Strong leadership from the poor and sustained mentality to eradicate poverty may have some answers for genuine participatory grassroots organisations. Participatory process seldom begins spontaneously. A leadership whose vision is external to the perceptions and aspirations of the people concerned generally initiates such processes. Resolving
this contradiction implies going beyond mere mobilization for the support of an extremely defined cause. 30

The United Nations General Assembly adopted the Declaration on the Right to Development in December 1986. Article one of the Declaration states that people are entitled "to participate in, contribute to and enjoy economic, social, cultural and political development. This is further clarified: as "the full mobilization of the right of peoples to self-determination...." 31

Local government system in India underwent drastic changes following the seventy-third and the seventy-fourth Constitutional Amendments. These amendments have constitutionalized the local self-government and sought to give it a new lease of life. The Seventy-third Amendment has thrown up many new challenges to the rural local government, the core and exciting one is the participation of rural folk. The amendment has attempted to institutionalize people's participation through a body, called Gram Sabha (or Village Assembly) that is present in most of the states of the nation with rather vestigial and nominal existence.

Gram Sabha literally means the village meeting meant to discuss the common problems encountered by villagers as a whole that is public problem. In many ways, it is comparable to the citizen forum, a forum of direct democracy in the ancient Greek City states. Gram Sabha is not only the place of relationship between the ruled and the rulers but also the one between the electors and the elected. 32

Democracy in a very big country like ours cannot be direct as in the historical Greek City States, it is indirect and is naturally representative in nature. But the direct democracy can prevail in the Gram Sabha of lowest tier of Panchayati Raj system. Here, people's participation is of primary importance. Things that have come up after the seventy-third and seventy-fourth Constitutional Amendments have most characteristics favourable of displaying direct democratic modalities in Gram Sabha. This information must reach all the citizens. They must be aware of the facilities
offered and must make best use of them to make direct democracy prevail at village level.

The new constitutional amendments are the outcome of democratic experiments in the Panchayati Raj Apparatus of independence India during 30 years extending from 1960 to 1992. Every lapse of our society has been correspondingly compensated in the new legislation like women reservation, reservation for weaker section and again with past experience, the Panchayats have been assigned some degree of stability in specifying time limit within which no Panchayat can be dissolved, financial stability and regular electoral process. These need appreciation of every citizen in accepting such a viable formula of local politics and making it a grand success. Participation from people has been implicitly invited.

Every village in India is not same nor people are of same financial status and same common need. India has heritage of multiple cultures and the sub-continent has variable environment. The variation provided by geographical prevalences has been further deepened by historical elements in building up thousands and thousands of villages of variable sociocultural, economics and political moieties. The world over local cultures embody their own uniqueness, but across cultures, there is universality of human need for freedom, dignity, and equal rights, an opportunity to change through self-determined choice. 33

Gram Sabha is an institution in the hands of people to air their grievances and to watch the functioning of the Panchayat. It also offers the Panchayat an opportunity to express the difficulties and problems by people for solution. In a situation of financial limitations, programme priorities opted by Gram Sabha will take note of the immediate and long term targets. Again, development works taken up at village level will be under the vision range of everyone. So transparency can be guaranteed.

Gram Sabha can ensure local unity and integrity. Local people will assemble in a common place in the village regularly to discuss on local affairs. This removes any bias in respect of caste or communal feeling. This will have a strong imprint on our
national character and individual thought process. Assimilation of cultural multiplicity and cultural harmony will be synthesized from the base of the nation.

No doubt, the earliest concept of local government function as training ground of politics will be further strengthened by the way the Grama Panchayat and Gram Sabha have been envisioned. The unity and integrity that these basic organisations have been enforced with will bring about very strong political backing to the village, will foster leadership, and will nourish tender and budding leadership in the village. Spokesmen of few will be encouraged to be patriots of village and will be interested in political activities of the localities to find further avenues for higher tiers of Panchayats or State or National levels. The success story of local government will bring about building of the nation by concrete experienced politicians.

Gram Sabha has the capacity to mobilize any individual for common purpose. Any participant of Gram Sabha can have a philanthropic element in his mind and he can be of use for the village community. Political participation is expected to bring about such activities such as:

- **Identity or lay down principles for identification of schemes which are required to be taken up on priority basis for economic development of the village.**

- **Constitute one or more beneficiary committees consisting of not more than five persons who are not members of the Grama Panchayats.**

- **Mobilize mass participation or community welfare programmes and programmes for adult education, family welfare and child welfare and child welfare.**

- **Lastly, promote solidarity and harmony among all sections of people irrespective of religion, faith, caste, creed or race and record its**
objection to any action of the Pradhan or any other development scheme properly or without active participation of the people of the area. 34

Decentralization as a Means of Self Governance:

In the federal system of governance in India and elsewhere in the world, the issue of decentralization continues to generate debate. But the inherent potential of democratization in the decentralized federal system has the seeds to empower people at the grassroots level. The argument centres around the fact that delivery of goods and services by those who shoulder responsibilities of governance should be closest to the people. The purpose of such an argument rests on the finer adjustments of the local functional autonomy through devolution of functions, powers and responsibility necessary for enabling the Panchayati Raj Institutions to act as the catalytic agents of rural development. In view of the enormous potential of PRIs to produce developmental benefits and to deepen democracy, the PRIs indeed need a number of institutional and financial prerequisites to perform essentially from the strategy of maintenance-oriented programmes to developmental-oriented ones including varieties of welfare activities. Benefits of decentralization are awaited, but the states like Karnataka, Kerala, Madhya Pradesh and West Bengal seem to have advanced in a big way, primarily due to political commitment and supportive institutional environment.

Admittedly, the idea of decentralization enjoys cheap popularity that has really increased during past few years. On account of many failures, the centralized state has lost a great deal of legitimacy. One such failure is attributed to the role of State in governance. Therefore decentralization process is a step to overcome the interventionists. Decentralization in political decision making power is the process from mere devolution of functions. The local politicians, by such process, ought to
transparent and accountable to the citizens and the remote areas in the state will be benefited.

Needless to say that decentralization efforts have two principal dimensions. One is the deepening of democracy by increasing autonomy and scope for participation at lower levels of the system. The second is devolution of powers and functions to lower levels of the administrative system. In India reforms have been emphasized in order to devolve the responsibility to Panchayats for ensuring effective implementation of developmental programmes. It is perceived that decentralized governance could widen the scope for political participation and also in determining development priorities. This is tantamount to a very bureaucratically-determined as well as top-down approach to decentralization. In this context, the Panchayati Raj Institutions could act as powerful instruments of assault on power brokers and vested interest groups.

**Structural Changes and Emerging Issues in People’s Empowerment:**

Structural changes in local administration is a priority in order to implement any step of devolution and decentralization. A major structural change in Panchayati Raj Institutions in Orissa has been implemented by the 73rd Constitutional Amendment with the main objective to accelerate socio-economic development for ensuring equity and social justice. Because, the exclusive purpose is to empower people to influence planning at the village level for ensuring local democracy and equal distribution of power. The Gram Sabhas have tremendous role in such position and there should be additional steps over the constitutional amendment to promote and popularize Gram Sabha. In this context, the Panchayat laws have been suitably and adequately amended to deal with traditional institutions of tribals for ensuring self-governance keeping in view 38.5 % of Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe population in the State as per Census, their traditions, customs, culture and means of livelihood sustenance.
A major hurdle to effective Panchayat reform in India had been excessive emphasis on devolution of administrative responsibility without a commensurate devolution of resources to local bodies. Further, representation without commensurate level of financial autonomy to respond to locally determined development priorities may result in limited reforms. This will result in frustration of elected representatives at their inability to translate local needs into development. Again the State Finance Commission of Orissa has emphasized generation of much of internal income by Panchayats to take care of the needs, which is again the sad tail of the same failure story of Panchayats in past.

Indian experience in West Bengal that has fostered a strong democratic concept at the grassroots is that the local institutions have some amount of extractive powers and second, they spend in a transparent way. This transparency guarantees greater future due to reliability. The fiscal autonomy of the Panchayats is still in the hands of the state government despite the big volumes of constitutionalization and schedule formation in the Indian Constitution. Unless transparency prevails in Panchayats, no state in the nation will confide in local representatives and local institutions.

SUMMARY:

In this chapter the concept of political participation in democracy has been reviewed. People's voice and involvement have been rated as strong instruments in democracy. Democracy cannot survive with apathy and alienation of its citizen.

The developmental history of people's participation in governance has been discussed. The point of origin has been traced from the Athens in Greece where the citizenry had law to participate directly in affairs of the Polis, of course, with the exception of slaves. Similar direct democracy is living today in the Swiss Communes. But a natural flow of direct democratic organisation can be traced in the history of our country, in the village councils that is still surviving as 'Gram Sabha'.
In a large country like India, success of democracy and agility of its citizenry is quite dependant on making grassroots organisation viable ground of democratic habits and norms. This is possible by the way of decentralizing power to grassroots organization like Panchayats. This is not exactly democracy from top to down in direction, rather promotion of democracy by supervision of national and state governments. Participation at grassroots has been emphasized and necessary structural configuration and legislation are implemented in order to create favourable fields for people's participation and self-governance.
END-POINTS:

11. Urban Young, Compliance and Public Authority, Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979,p.29
29. For further analysis see Local Democracies: A Study in Comparative Local Government ed. by Margaret Bowman and William Hampton, Longman Cheshire, Melbourne, Australia, 1983,p.17.
32. Datta, P. op.cit. p.57.
34. Datta, P. op.cit. pp.58-60.