SETTING BENCHMARKS IN MEDICARE

Tone can deny the fact that the country, under the ruling dispensation led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi has witnessed major reforms in all the sectors during last more than eight years. The country, wherein no attention was paid towards scientific advancements and other researches, has now secured status of being frontrunner in many fields, thereby proving to the world that there is no dearth of talent in the country and the things like proper guidance and platforms, which were earlier missing, have been provided by the Government. In a major development, scientists have fabricated monolayers of pure myelin basic protein (MBP), a major protein component of myelin sheath, which is a protective membrane that wraps around the axon of nerve cells and acts as a model protein in studying diseases like multiple sclerosis (MS). MBP helps in compactification of the myelin sheath, and the fabricated tailored monolayers can give an in-depth understanding of the role of MBP in forming multi-lamellar myelin sheath structure as well as preserving the integrity, stability, and compactness of the sheath. A research group from physical sciences division of the Institute of Advanced Study in Science and Technology, Guwahati, an autonomous institute of North-East India under the Department of Science and Technology, used a technique called the Langmuir-Blodgett (LB) technique to form monolayers of pure myelin basic protein at the air-water and air-solid interfaces. This research group is led by Dr. Sarathi Kundu, Associate Professor, along with Raktim J. Sarmah, a Senior Research Fellow, have explained the mechanism of formation of MBP while tracking the stability and rigidity of the protein films by tuning the subphase pH conditions. The reversible nature of the molecules confirms the flexibility of the films with respect to the pH conditions. The behaviour of the protein under variable pH conditions were investigated from different areas of the monolayer formed at the air-water interface. The rigidity of the mono-layers were correlated with the specific domains formed and

the area occupied by the domains on the water surface. The closely packed MBP layer formed at the airwater and also on solid surfaces fabricated by the LB method will be helpful in studying different chemical and physical properties in 2D in the vicinity of protein environment. The deposited LB films of MBP may also be considered as protein nano-templates to crystallize proteins of interest. This research work was recently published in the journal of Colloids and Surfaces, Physicochemical and Engineering Aspects under the reputed Elsevier publishers.

through Panchayati Raj System

Panchayati Raj Day across the nation. This day marks the passing of Constitution (73rd Amendment) Act, 1992 that came into force from 24th of April, 1993. First National Panchayati Raj Day was celebrated in 2010. The Panchayati Raj System empowers rural communities by giving them a voice in the decision-making process and providing them with the resources to address their needs and improve their lives. The Indian Government constituted 'Balwant Rai Mehta Committee' in January 1957 to study the Community Development and National Extension Service (NES) programmes especially from the point of view of assessing the extent of popular participation and to recommend such types of institutions through which such participation could be achieved. Panchayati Raj was first started at Nagaur (Rajasthan) and Andhra Pradesh in 1959. The enactment of 73rd Amendment Act had led a defining moment in the history of India which helped in the decentralization of political power at grass root level. It permitted states/UTs to organize village Panchayats and provide them with the necessary powers and authority necessary to facilitate them to function as units of self-government. The Union Ministry of Panchayati Raj organizes National Conference and awards to the best performing Gram Panchayats with the Panchayat Shashakatikaran Puraskar/Rashtriya Gaurav Gram Sabha Puruskar on this day. In the 73rd Amendment of the Indian Constitution for the first time in the history of India, minimum numbers of seats were allotted to women in Panchayats. Meager representation of women in the state and national legislatures, reservation not less than one-third of the total number of seats and chairpersons of Panchayats is considered as a significant landmark in the process of political empowerment of women. Clause(3) of Art.243-D inserted in the Indian Constitution by the 73rd Amendment Act provides that not less than one-third of the total number of seats to be filled by direct election in every Panchayat shall be reserved for women and such seats may be allotted by rota-

India is the biggest democracy in the world. Democracy ensures empowerment and Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) guarantees participations of all the sections of society. Gender inequality has been identified as the classic inequality trap that produces further inequalities in societies with negative consequences. Empowerment of women is essentially the process of upliftment of economic, social and political status of women. It involves the building of a society wherein women can breathe without the fear of oppression, exploitation, apprehension, discrimination and the general feeling of persecution which goes with being a woman in a traditionally male dominated structure. The development in any society would be slow if women who constitute about 50 per cent of population are

tion to different constituencies in a Panchayat.

Rural women empowerment

Empowerment of women has been a subject of discussion in the contemporary world. Women empowerment refers to the process by which women acquire due recognisation on par with men, to participate as a partner with human dignity in the development process of society through the political institutions aims at enhancing their ability in the decision making process. India with a female population of over 600 million possesses a vast reservoir of women power which exceeds the combined total population of South-East Asian countries. The significant achievements of 73rd Amendment Act concerning reservation of seats and political offices in favour of women and the disadvantaged sections of the rural community is that it had improved their awareness, perceptional levels and rightful share in the decision-making exercise. A brief spell is not enough in the history of nation to judge the rationale of political empowerment of women and other weaker sections of society. Social change in the rural India is already perceptible. Political improvement holds the key for their social and economic improvement. There is need to be cynical about the prospects of the Constitutional safeguards provided to the women and weaker sections to ensure their effective participation in the decentralized democratic decisionmaking process. The 73rd Constitutional Amendment is considered not only the historic but radical for the first time in the history of India. It has made mandatory provisions for the reservations of a minimum number of seats and offices of chairpersons to women as well as to the marginalized sections of the society. All states/UTs have introduced these Constitutional imperatives in their respective Panchayat Acts. In the context, many rural women entered the political arena for the time due to persuasion of their family members' caste and political leaders. The male-dominant rural power creates social pressure on women aspirants who possess the necessary enthusiasm and ability to assume political leadership. The village males should rather encourage and offer support to them. In addition, women are organized in to Self Help Groups (SHGs) to mark the beginning of a major process of empowering them. The 73rd Amendment to the Indian Constitution has greatly contributed to the political empowerment of women and marginalized sections of society. There were skeptics who were favourably disposed to the proposition of women leadership. Guided by their traditional dominance in a patriarchal society, the males used to cite some of the disabilities of women like illiteracy, family responsibilities, and experience, poverty and communication skills etc. as the inhibiting factors for effective participation of women in the decision-making process at the local level. The upper caste males were frantically in search of methods through which their traditional hold in the rural sector could be retained. The women from marginalized communities in the rural areas were not initially very confident of their abilities to assume their leadership in the Panchayats.

ditional grip over the rural institutions. This led to the nomination of women members of their families or relatives for the non-SC/ST political seats in the Panchavats. Many of these women who never left their homes had to contest the polls with the support of their husbands. Caste, money and muscle power were also used by the dominant males to ensure their victory in several cases. There are many instances where the elected women in the Panchavats had to depend on their family members to perform their official duties. Most of these women do not know the nuances of the Panchayat administration and they used to dependent on their husbands for transaction official business. In many cases husbands or the brothers of elected women preside over the Panchayat meetings and deliberations in absence of the elected women. In many cases the elected women in the Panchayats are not so literate, aware, experienced etc. and in many cases they are depending on their male counterparts in decision-making. In regard to the elected Sarpanchs and Panchs in the village Panchayats they have to depend on their masters who are the traditional power-holders. With the few exceptions, women members of marginalized communities who are relatively literate and have political ambitions or family history of political participation, volunteer to contest elections in the Panchayats. These women also depend on their own family members and relatives for electioneering. There is nothing wrong if the women seek the support of the traditional male leadership as a learning process but they should be encouraged by their male counterparts. The training programmes for the elected women members in Panchayats should be organised at state/UT, district and block levels respectively. The teaching methods for these women's should be simpler as possible. Group discussions, success stories and case studies of successful women should be the part of training. Electronic media and audio-visual aids should be utilized in their training programmes. Government should introduce incentives for the Panchayats headed by women of marginalized sections of the society for good performance and attendance. Ultimately the improvements in the literacy among women and weaker sections hold the key factor for their effective participation in decision making process and involvement with the developmental activities in the rural areas. Thanks to the mass media/print media for highlighting the need of women empowerment in the rural areas. Still there is need to improve their educational, social and economic status. There is dire need to bridge the gender gap in the society because no society can progress without the social participation of women. The men folk should develop a positive attitudinal changes and mental make-up in favour of women.

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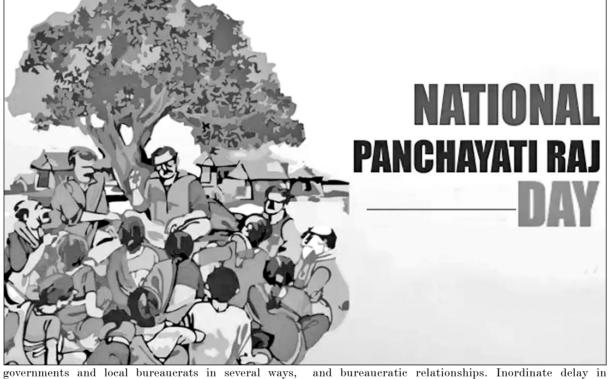
consent is needed for payments. Sarpanch and

National Panchayati Raj Day

Need to further strengthen Panchayati Raj system

tate governments bind local governments through local bureaucracies. For example, approval of pub-Clic works projects often requires technical approval and administrative approval from local officials of the rural development department, a tedious process for Sarpanchs that requires repeated visits to government offices. The capacity of the Sarpanchs to exercise administrative control over the local staff is limited. In many states, local functionaries reporting to the Panchayat, such as village watchmen or sanitation workers, are recruited at the district or block level. Often the Sarpanch does not even have the power to dismiss these local-level employees.

Nowadays we are getting to hear and read such news that the sarpanch of a certain village in the country committed suicide due to debt. Why is this happening? In India's Panchayati Raj system, there is a Gram Panchayat or Gram Sabha at the village or small town level, which is a major component of India's local selfgovernance. The Sarpanch is the elected supreme representative of the Gram Sabha. Since ancient times, Panchayat has had an important place in the social, political, and economic life of India. Every aspect of public life was governed by it. At present, in protest against e-Panchayat, village secretaries are holding Dharnas in gram panchayats across Haryana state and BDPO offices are being locked, the government is going to start an e-system in gram panchayats. The Sarpanchs of Haryana say that such a system will not work in the Gram Panchayat. In such a situation, the development work of the villages will be affected. If the development work is not done, the villagers will also come to the streets. By the 73rd Constitutional Amendment in the Indian Constitution, a provision has been made for the participation of local people in the development of rural areas through the Panchayati Raj system. More than three decades after the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendment Acts, state governments, through local bureaucracies, continue to exercise considerable discretionary power and influence over panchavats. In India, the powers of local elected officials (such as the sarpanch in Telangana) are severely limited by state



governments and local bureaucrats in several ways, undermining the spirit of constitutional amendments to empower locally elected officials. Gram Panchayats are financially dependent on grants (discretionary and nondiscretionary grants) from the state and the Center for day-to-day activities. Broadly speaking, panchayats have three main sources of funding - their sources of revenue (local taxes, revenue from common property resources, etc.), grants-in-aid from central and state governments, and discretionary or plan-based funds. Its sources of revenue (both tax and non-tax) constitute a small proportion of the total Panchayat funds. Access to discretionary grants for panchayats depends on political

transferring sanctioned funds to Panchayat accounts stalls local development. There are also severe restrictions on how to use the funds allocated to them. State governments often impose expenditure limits on various expenditures through Panchayat funds. Like recently in Haryana government going to start an e-system in Gram Panchayat. This type of system will not work in the Gram Panchayat. In such a situation, the development work of the villages will be affected. If the development work is not done, the villagers will also come to the streets. The Panchayat provides for the dual authority to spend the fund. Even with Sarpanchs, bureaucratic

Panchayat Secretary should co-sign the check issued for payment from Panchayat Fund. State governments bind local governments through local bureaucracies. For example, approval of public works projects often requires technical approval and administrative approval from local officials of the rural development department, a tedious process for sarpanches that requires repeated visits to government offices. The capacity of the Sarpanchs to exercise administrative control over the local staff is limited. In many states, local functionaries reporting to the panchavat, such as village watchmen or sanitation workers, are recruited at the district or block level. Often the Sarpanch does not even have the power to dismiss these local-level employees. Unlike elected officials at other levels, Sarpanchs can be dismissed while in office. Gram Panchayat Acts in many states have empowered district-level bureaucrats, mostly district collectors, to take action against Sarpanchs for official misconduct. Across the country, there are regu lar instances of bureaucrats taking decisions to dismiss Sarpanchs from office. More Sarpanchs have been dismissed from office in recent years.

Sarpanches need administrative or financial autonomy for meaningful decentralization. The Ministry of Panchayats should monitor the release and expenditure of Finance Commission grants to ensure that there is no delay in their release. Panchavats should be encouraged to conduct local audits regularly so that Finance Commission grants are not delayed. The Ministry of Panchayats should make serious efforts towards recruitment and posting of supporting and technical staff to ensure the smooth functioning of Panchayats. Strengthening of Panchayats through capacity building and training should be given more encouragement from the Central and State Governments. This will enable them to prepare better Gram Panchayat Development Plans, as well as become more responsive to the needs of the citizens. This a wake-up call for state governments to re-examine the provisions of their respective gram Panchayat laws and consider greater devolution of funds, functions, and functionaries to local govern-

'Sarpanch-Pati' becoming obstacle in women empowerment

omen leaders are more likely to be influenced by family members after running for election and winning; Most of the work is handled by the male members of the family. Seemingly the women won the election but are being indirectly controlled by male members. The male members handled the matter and answered the questions of the people, while the women continued with their household chores. Despite being leaders, women face many barriers that make them vulnerable to discrimination and abuse, resulting in the denial of equality of status and opportunities in the social, economic, and political spheres. Women constitute almost half of the population of India. Women have been an integral part of the social structure not only because of their importance in sustaining the human race but also because of their significant contribution to socio-economic progress. Despite this, women have been subjected to discrimination due to gender bias in social attitudes and social practices, resulting in the denial of equality of status and opportunities in socioeconomic and political spheres

In April 1993, India took a historic step towards development with the implementation

of the 73rd Amendment to the Constitution, which provided for reservation for weaker sections of the population in Panchayat Raj institutions. Through this amendment, one-third of the seats as members and chairpersons of these institutions are reserved for women. By 1995, the number of women in Panchayats increased rapidly, with the highest representation in Kerala and Madhya Pradesh where women filled 38 per cent of seats (Ahmed et al., 2008). Of the 3 million representatives, 1.3 million are women who are now actively participating in Panchayats (Bhatnagar, 2019). Currently, 20 states in India have made provisions in their respective State Panchayati Raj Acts and increased the reservation for women to 50 per cent. Additionally, states such as Odisha have made it mandatory that if the chairman in a village is a man, the vice-chairman must be a woman (Mohanty, 1995). The provisions of reservation for women have transformed the grassroots democracy and empowered the rural women to exercise their rights and get involved in the village administration. Women's participation in grassroots politics has been low because of the patriarchal mindset that women belong at home, where their responsibilities are limited to

household chores and child-rearing. Women are thus actively discriminated against and since they have limited decision-making powers in the household, it is unrealistic to assume that they have many opportunities to make decisions for the community. With the 73rd Amendment laving the foundation for change, the political landscape has changed and women are becoming more active. Elected women representatives have transformed local governance by strengthening the position of marginalized sections of society and empowering those who have no voice. Furthermore, they inspire other women in society to break gender stereotypes and involve themselves in the decision-making process. Another important role that the elected women representatives play is to bring about rural development. They have been able to overcome various political hurdles and bring about paramount change for the betterment of their communities. Women are known to be effective leaders and bring transparency and efficiency to their daily duties and administration. They understand the needs of their community and work well to bring awareness and solve the issues faced by the community. Therefore, in many cases, women leaders drive rural development faster than their

male predecessors, despite dealing with various obstacles such as lobbying hard for additional funds and resources. Furthermore, women are considered to be true agents of social revolution against socially regressive practices such as child marriage, the Pardah system, and the dowry system to create a society free from oppression and discrimination. With the entry of women into the political arena, the face of democracy has changed from a representative democracy to a participatory one. With women taking leadership roles in the villages, she is known to take action against caste-based or gender violence of any kind. From seeing women as recipients of welfare benefits to involving them as successful agents of revolution, the debate on women's empowerment has progressed. However, despite being leaders, women face many barriers that make them vulnerable to discrimination and abuse.

The establishment of Panchayati Raj Institutions in our country gives a woman an opportunity to prove her worth as a good administrator, decision-maker, or a good leader. The 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act, of 1992 is a milestone in this regard. This gives women a chance to come forward. This experiment is proving to be a big success, especially by giving women an opportunity to step out of their homes and participate in the administrative and political fields. It has to be considered that the inclusion of qualified women in Gram Panchayati at the initial stage of inter-linkage of Panchavati Raj Institutions in rural areas will be an important auxiliary measure in planning for the improvement of social status and empowerment of women. Women are half the population of our country. We must encourage women in such a big democracy of the world. Government, non-governmental organizations, and universities have to play an important role in this field to give proper status to women. This group of women, if provided with representation at the Gram Panchayat level, can rise strongly and handle issues related to the betterment of women, play a major role in the decision-making process and the status of women in the meeting may make suitable recommendations for improvement. This creates opportunities for women to have greater control over the provision of services and the management of the resources they benefit from. A good number of women competing with men in local politics are seen to advance gender agendas toward gender equality.