

Women in Governance  
50♂:50♀  
Get the Balance Right

24 April

Women's Political Empowerment Day

Editorial

## Women's Political Empowerment-How long the road will remain less travelled

At last there is a silver lining on the horizon. For the last so many years, political parties have been assuring its support to the Women's Reservation Bill. But year after year politicians, ready to commit suicide tore copies of the Bill and finally the Bill had to be pushed back till it is pushed forth as and when required in subsequent years with the same result. Now this mockery seems to have stopped, considering that the UPA Government is for 33 per cent reservation for women in parliament and assemblies and 50 per cent in local governments. Bihar, Uttarakhand, Himachal Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh have already given 50 per cent reservation for women in rural and urban local bodies.

It was not less than 33 percent women's reservation in local governments through 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments which led political parties and policy makers to draft the women's reservation bill for Parliament and state legislatures. Skeptics were proved wrong by women panchayat leaders. They showed their great determination and efficiency in their panchayats. Strong foundation was laid by the successes as well as sacrifices of many women who fought for the cause. We salute them for propelling the movement which began 16 years back.

An International Labour Organisation study shows that "while women represent 50 percent of the world's adult population and a third of the official labour force, they perform nearly two-third of all working hours, receive a tenth of world income and own less than one percent of world property." Therefore, reservation for women is an honest recognition of their contribution to national

development. Studies show that women panchayat leaders are for transparency and accountability in the system. Their priority has been education, particularly girl child education, health and sanitation.

Women political empowerment has exploded many myths, like women are passive, not interested in public affairs, they are proxy candidates and so on. The surge of all women panchayat members in various states deserve mention here. Women panchayat leaders are now on the road to increasing empowerment. State governments, civil society organisations and media are also recognising the outstanding women leaders in the panchayat. Recently, President of India, Pratibha Patil in her address in Parliament stated that the government was impressed by the bold and courageous steps taken by elected women leaders to fight against social evils.

The need of the hour is to amend the 73rd Amendment to promote women's equal participation in three tiers of panchayats. All women's organisations and civil society organisations should form a common platform with a single agenda. It must become a mass social movement and send out a message to all political parties, warning them that women will withdraw their backing in the next election if they do not support the women's reservation bill and their 50 percent reservation in local governments now. And this will be achieved only when women and men come together on equal platform in all fields- in the ratio of 50:50.

## A lone crusader against land mafia

Vijay Kumar Singh, a retired school teacher of Chausna Village, Muzaffarnagar, Uttar Pradesh, has stood up as a lone crusader against the land mafia operating in his panchayat. For the last 13 years, he has been staging dharnas outside the district magistrate's office at district headquarter. His demand is loud and clear-get panchayat land freed from the clutches of 3Ms-money, muscle and mafia. He accused a former MLA and his relatives for occupying 3,200 bigha panchayat land. This land is worth Rs. 800 million. Allegedly, about 100 influential people of the village have been illegally using village panchayat land to serve their own vested interests for years. In 2007, a small portion of land measuring 300 bighas was freed when the matter came to the notice of Chief Minister Mayawati. The state government is also reported to have conducted several enquiries at different levels. District Authorities and Criminal Investigation Department of the state have finally acted on the complaints of Vijay Kumar. Though his efforts have borne some fruits, he has still to go a long way.