

Role of Panchayat Raj Institutions in Rural Development

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Abstract: *The dream of 'Gram Swaraj' of our beloved father of nation, Mahatma Gandhi and motto of 'Power to People' are essence of true democracy. The task of capacity building of these large numbers of Panchayats is quite gigantic exercise. As per the assessment of the Ministry of Panchayati Raj even after 22 years of enactment of 73rd Constitutional (Amendment) Act and also after having three rounds of Panchayat elections in many States in India the empowerment of Panchayats have not taken place as envisioned in the 73rd Constitution (Amendment) Act in 1992. Rural development programmes are therefore conceived and implemented as part of a national development strategy. The present strategy of rural development mainly focuses on poverty alleviation, better livelihood opportunities, provision of basic amenities and infrastructure facilities through various programmes of wage and self-employment. This paper is intended to emphasize the rural development role of panchayats and measures to improve their functioning. Rural development initiatives have emerged from a national development strategy adopted by country at different phases of its development.*

Key Words: *Panchayat Raj Institutions, Rural Development, Reviews.*

1. INTRODUCTION:

The Panchayati Raj is a South Asian political system mainly in India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Nepal. It is the oldest system of local government in the Indian subcontinent. The dream of 'Gram Swaraj' of Mahatma Gandhi and motto of 'Power to People' are essence of true democracy. The task of capacity building of these large numbers of Panchayats is quite gigantic exercise. As per the assessment of the Ministry of Panchayati Raj even after 20 years of enactment of 73rd Constitutional (Amendment) Act and also after having three rounds of Panchayat elections in many States in India the empowerment of Panchayats has not taken place as envisioned in the 73rd Constitution (Amendment) Act in 1992. The panchayats, i.e., the government at the grass root level, play a vital role in the implementation of the various programmes. The 73rd Constitutional Amendment passed in 1992 has provides, inter alia, the devolution of development functions with authority and resources from the state to these bodies, thereby created a space and opportunity for decentralized participatory local development effort with in-built pressures for accountability. These institutions now have control of all rural development programmes. It is in this backdrop, this paper seeks to study and interrogate the role of panchayats in the rural development (Chhetri 2015). The concept of Panchayati Raj seemed for a while in the years after Indian independence to have disappeared permanently into the mists of India's romantic past. In the late twentieth century however the notion has returned once more to the political agenda, for a variety of reasons: strategic, practical, economic, and ideology. The panchayats must be given adequate powers to use resources and undertake integrated local development.

1.1. PANCHAYAT RAJ INSTITUTES EVOLVE IN INDIAN CONTEXT:

Rural development has been massively a government supported process rather than the people-led process in India. To formulate and implement rural development programmes an appropriate institutional structure is required. This need was met by the establishment of Panchayat Raj Institution (PRIs) in India. Further, the PRIs, being local self-governing bodies ensure, the opportunity for people's participation and involvement in the formulation and implementation of rural development programmes. Thus, the PRIs are entrusted with the task of promoting rural development in India. Since Independence greater emphasis has been laid on the social, economic and planning policy of our country for creating an appropriate rural, economic and social infrastructure and to promote an overall development. The planning policy of our county accorded the highest priority to agriculture and rural development. The measures envisaged from the first five-year plan had considerable bearing for the growth of rural economy. The first five-year plan laid down that "development of agriculture, based on the utilization of man power resources of the

countryside and the maximum use of local resources, holds a key to the rapid development of the country” (Kadam 2012).

2. LITERATURE REVIEW:

Ananth P (2014) Elected representatives feel threatened that their new-found status would get eroded by direct empowerment of the people, the former also being employers of the latter, typically wage labourers. But ironically, as pointed out in a paper titled women in Panchayati Raj: grassroots democracy in India, "grassroots democracy in India has been ushered in by an amendment to the constitution from the "top". This was not because of a mass movement by the people." this calls for some serious thought in the direction of why power equations are perpetrated and consistently upset any attempt at moving towards greater development and empowerment of the poor. Chhetri (2015) The Eleventh Schedule of the Constitution which relates to Panchayats contains 29 subjects like agriculture, minor irrigation, land reforms, education, health, rural housing, poverty alleviation and rural development programmes maintenance of community assets, and so on.

3. CLASSIFICATION OF ITEMS UNDER ELEVENTH SCHEDULE (ARTICLE 243G)

CORE FUNCTIONS:

- Drinking water
- Roads, culverts, bridges, ferries, waterways, and other means of communication.
- Rural electrification, including distribution of electricity.
- Health and sanitation, including hospitals, primary health centers, and dispensaries.
- Maintenance of community assets.

WELFARE FUNCTIONS

- Rural housing
- Non-conventional energy sources
- Poverty alleviation program
- Education, including primary and secondary schools
- Technical training and vocational education
- Adult and informal education
- Libraries
- Cultural activities
- Family welfare
- Woman 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 Scheduled Tribes
- Public distribution system

AGRICULTURE AND ALLIED FUNCTIONS

- Agriculture, including agricultural extension
- Land improvement, implementation of land reforms, land consolidation, and soil conservation
- Minor irrigation, water management, and watershed development
- Animal husbandry, dairying, and poultry
- Fisheries
- Social forestry and farm forestry
- Minor forest produce
- Fuel and fodder
- Markets and fairs

INDUSTRIES

- Small-scale industries, including food processing industries
- Khadi, village, and cottage industries.

Decentralised and democratic arrangement can encourage more flexible government programmes and policies (in particular, one that move away from agricultural productivity), enhance government commitment to rural development

and reduce economic disparities within regions (Manor, 1999). Azhruddin (2018) pointed the socio-political changes expected from the introduction of Panchayati raj system have not fulfilled and remained largely unfulfilled for long. More importantly the objectives like social equality, gender equity and changes at the grassroots level leadership envisaged as the main objectives of panchayati raj are not achieved in a meaningful manner. There is a need to change the system of planning at all India level. A gradual shift from sectorial planning to area planning is necessary in the context of increasing people’s participation in the planning process. Anupriya, et al (2017) The need for rural communities is a broad range of development goals. Rural people need to be given proper education, infrastructure facilities, entrepreneurship skills and so on. Rural development is a dynamic process, which is mainly concerned with the rural areas which include agricultural growth, economic, social infrastructure, housing and house sites for the landless, village planning, public health, education and functional literacy, communication etc.

State-wise Share of Rural Population in Total Rural Population of India (Per Cent) (2001 and 2011)

Sl. No.	States	2001	2011	Change
1	2	3	4	5 = 4-3
1.	Andhra Pradesh	72.7	66.6	-6.1
2.	Arunachal Pradesh	79.2	77.1	-2.2
3.	Assam	87.1	85.9	-1.2
4.	Bihar	89.5	88.7	-0.8
5.	Chhattisgarh	79.9	76.8	-3.2
6.	Goa	50.2	37.8	-12.4
7.	Gujarat	62.6	57.4	-5.2
8.	Haryana	71.1	65.1	-6.0
9.	Himachal Pradesh	90.2	90.0	-0.2
10.	Jammu & Kashmir	75.2	72.6	-2.6
11.	Jharkhand	77.8	76.0	-1.8
12.	Karnataka	66.0	61.3	-4.7
13.	Kerala	74.0	52.3	-21.7
14.	Madhya Pradesh	73.5	72.4	-1.2
15.	Maharashtra	57.6	54.8	-2.8
16.	Manipur	73.4	67.5	-5.9
17.	Meghalaya	80.4	79.9	-0.5
18.	Mizoram	50.4	47.9	-2.5
19.	Nagaland	82.8	71.1	-11.6
20.	Odisha	85.0	83.3	-1.7
21.	Punjab	66.1	62.5	-3.6
22.	Rajasthan	76.6	75.1	-1.5
23.	Sikkim	88.9	74.8	-14.1
24.	Tamil Nadu	56.0	51.6	-4.4
25.	Tripura	82.9	73.8	-9.1
26.	Uttar Pradesh	79.2	77.7	-1.5
27.	Uttarakhand	74.3	69.8	-4.6
28.	West Bengal	72.0	68.1	-3.9
	All-India	72.2	68.8	-3.3

Sources: Census of India, 2001; 2011.

Note: Telangana was awarded separate statehood on 2 June 2014. Hence, was not covered in 2011 census separately

State-wise number of Panchayati Raj Institutions (District, Intermediate and Village Panchayats):

Sl. No.	Name of the States/ UTs	District Panchayats	Intermediate Panchayats	Village Panchayats	No. of Traditional Bodies
1	Andaman and Nicobar Islands	3	9	70	201
2	Andhra Pradesh	13	660	12918	N.A
3	Arunachal Pradesh	22	177	1785	N.A
4	Assam	26	191	2201	512
5	Bihar	38	534	8386	N.A
6	Chandigarh	1	1	1	N.A
7	Chhattisgarh	27	146	10978	N.A
8	Dadra and Nagar Haveli	1	N.A	20	N.A
9	Daman and Diu	2	N.A	15	N.A
10	Delhi	N.A	N.A	N.A	N.A
11	Goa	2	N.A	191	N.A
12	Gujarat	33	248	14292	N.A
13	Haryana	21	126	6197	N.A
14	Himachal Pradesh	12	78	3226	N.A
15	Jammu and Kashmir	22	306	4482	N.A
16	Jharkhand	24	263	4370	N.A
17	Karnataka	30	176	6021	N.A
18	Kerala	14	152	941	N.A
19	Lakshadweep	1	N.A	10	N.A
20	Madhya Pradesh	51	313	22817	N.A
21	Maharashtra	34	351	27870	N.A
22	Manipur	6	N.A	161	3533
23	Meghalaya	N.A	N.A	N.A	6746
24	Mizoram	N.A	N.A	N.A	905
25	Nagaland	N.A	N.A	N.A	1250
26	Odisha	30	314	6798	N.A
27	Puducherry	N.A	10	98	N.A
28	Punjab	22	147	13279	N.A
29	Rajasthan	33	295	9892	N.A
30	Sikkim	4	N.A	185	N.A
31	Tamil Nadu	31	385	12523	N.A
32	Telangana	9	438	13057	N.A
33	Tripura	8	35	591	628
34	Uttar Pradesh	75	822	58791	N.A
35	Uttarakhand	13	95	7762	N.A
36	West Bengal	22	342	3340	1
	Total	630	6614	253268	13776

Source: <http://lgdirectory.gov.in>

4. DISCUSSION AND SUGGESTIONS:

The panchayats throughout their evolution have been assigned different roles and responsibilities by policy-makers for the development of rural areas. The panchayat raj and subsequent policies of different government have envisaged a greater role of village level PRIs such as Gram Sabha and Gram Panchayat in local development. They have an irreplaceable role to play in rural development. The 73rd Amendment and consequent State Acts have provided various mechanisms to enable panchayats to perform this role more effectively. Being representative democratic bodies at local level, panchayats are better suited to oversee the local development process. Entrusting these bodies with the

primary responsibility of development initiatives such as watershed development, drinking water distribution system and other similar projects help in achieving the goal of holistic and sustainable development of local areas. Local people generally felt that PRIs are better suited for delivering development benefits than the bureaucracy, especially in view of the better accountability of the PRIs to the people as against the bureaucrats (Meenakshisundaram, 2005).

5. CONCLUSION:

It is imperative to review Panchayati raj bodies in the era of globalization and liberalization. Local initiatives and development efforts can enhance competitiveness and income generation among the village communities. Thus, rural urban divide can be minimized by using panchayati raj institutions as an effective catalyst for making villages self-reliant and competitive. The philosophy of Panchayat Raj is deeply steeped in tradition and culture of rural India. It is by no means a new concept. Panchayat Raj provided a system of self-governance at the village level. Panchayat Raj Institutions is the grass root unit of self-government. It has been declared as the vehicle of socio-economic transformation in rural India. Effective and meaningful functioning of these bodies would depend on active involvement contribution and participation of its citizens, both male and female. The role of such institutions is so vital in the rural development.

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