



# Challenges in Grass-root Politics: A Study of a Tribal Village in Arunachal Pradesh

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## “Abstract”

India is predominantly rural in character where nearly two-third of its total population lives in village areas. The urgent need of rural development is essential for the overall development of a country. Development is a process leading to change in social, economic, and political aspects of life. Rural development is an all-round development of rural area. It occupies a very significant position in the context of Arunachal Pradesh, because a large number of populations of this state reside into the remote villages. Keeping in view with this, a new political institution known as Panchayati Raj was introduced. Subsequently, different schemes for rural development have been provided by the government with active role of the Panchayat bodies in Arunachal Pradesh. However, there are still certain challenges as per as meaningful working of Panchayati Raj is concerned at grass-root level. Therefore, there is a need to focus on various challenges in the village politics for upliftment of village life.

**Keywords:** *Challenges, Grass-root politics, Panchayati Raj, rural development,*

## Introduction

Arunachal Pradesh is situated in North Eastern part of India lying roughly between the latitudes 26<sup>0</sup>28' North and 29<sup>0</sup>30' North and the longitudes 91<sup>0</sup>30' East and 97<sup>0</sup>30' East. It spreads over an area of 83,743 square kilometers which is 2.73 per cent of the total area of India. The state is bounded on the north by China, on the east by Myanmar, on the south by Assam and Nagaland and on the west by Bhutan. Arunachal Pradesh has about 1630 km long international border; 160 km with Bhutan, 1030 km with China and 440km with Myanmar<sup>1</sup>.

Arunachal Pradesh had to go through series of constitutional process and development to acquire the present status. The name Arunachal Pradesh was formally announced on 20<sup>th</sup> January 1972 by the then Prime Minister of India, Mrs Indra Gandhi, at Ziro, headquarter of the then Subansiri district (presently under Lower Subansiri district). The state also got its independent political status when it was made union Territory as per North East state reorganization Agency Act 1971, by renaming erstwhile North East Frontier Agency (NEFA) comprising five districts of Kameng, Subansiri, Siang, Lohit and Tirap. The Union Territory was later on elevated to a full-fledged state on 20<sup>th</sup> February 1987 and became the 24<sup>th</sup> state of the Indian Republic<sup>2</sup>.

Society and politics in contemporary India is undergoing through a process of social modernization and political development. This trend is more apparent in the tribal societies of North-East India which are bounded with traditional ethos. The introduction of rationalized administration, improved means of communication, education, democratic institution and development have been interacting with the traditional, social and political institutions of Arunachal Pradesh. A change as conceived through development is the outcome of the effort on the part of Government by its planning and administration. It is a continuous process and never static

Political changes which affect whole society came mainly from external sources in the area. Introduction of Panchayati Raj in 1969 is one such. The introduction of Panchayati Raj in 1969 and subsequent political changes brought the traditional political and social institutions at grassroots level face to face with modern Governmental institutions and democratic process. This brought about changes in the village community.

## Literature Review

Keeping in consideration of the importance of Panchayati Raj system, several scholars have done important works focusing this in their writings. Aslam, M. (New Delhi, 2007); in his book, *Panchayati Raj in India*, has outlined the evolution of Panchayati Raj institution in India. It has regarded the Panchayati Raj as an important mechanism for decentralizing power and ensuring people's participation in development activities.

Chaube, S.K., (Calcutta, 1973); in his book, *Hills politics in North East India*, has dealt with the initiatives of Panchayat system for the rural development of Arunachal Pradesh and outlined the important of people's participation through Panchayat.

Danggen, B (Itanagar, 2009); in his book *Logical approach to local self government in the light of independent councils and Panchayati Raj of Arunachal Pradesh*, has discussed about the Panchayati Raj system of Arunachal Pradesh from the report of Ering Committee 1965 and introduction of NEFA Panchayati Raj 1967 to the Arunachal Pradesh local authority Act 2006. Besides, a brief account of the village councils of the tribes of Arunachal Pradesh has also been discussed.

Dubey, S, (New Delhi, 2005) ; in his book *Dynamic of Tribal Local Polity and Panchayati Raj in Arunachal Pradesh*, discusses about the origin and historical evolution of the Panchayati Raj institutions in Arunachal Pradesh. It also states that the Panchayati Raj institution has contributed a significant change in socio-economic and political development at grass-root level as well as in state in macro level perspective. It has viewed that there is a significant declined of the traditional village council system in Arunchal Pradesh due to influenced of modern political institution.

Talukdar, A.C (Guwahati, 1987); in his book, *Political Transition in Tribal India*, discusses in detail about the introduction of Panchayat Raj on the basis of the recommendation of Dying Ering committee and its impact on tribal village council of the East Siang district. It states that introduction of Panchayati Raj has given a new orientation to politics in Arunachal Pradesh which was deeply imbedded in “small group” psyche. Moreover, the author has also focussed on the changing scenario of rural area after the emergence of Panchayati Raj in Arunachal Pradesh. **Objectives of the study**

The study was undertaken with a view to the following objectives:

- (i) To examine Panchayati Raj system
- (ii) To find out the challenges in Panchayati Raj sytem.
- (iii)To understand people’s perceptions towards Panchayati Raj system.

### **Methodology and Tools**

The study is based on participant and non-participant observations. Thus, it is partly empirical and partly reflective. The main tools for the study were suitably designed and partially structured questionnaire cum-interview schedules. The extensive field notes of the discussions have also been maintained as a significant aid to the analysis of the data in this study by the researcher. The data for the study has been drawn from both primary and secondary sources. The main source of primary data was the field study and survey. The secondary sources included books, relevant official records and document, government websites, articles of journals, archival materials, District Handbooks and both published and unpublished works.

## Sample Size

The study is based on 180 sample respondents. The sample consists of Panchayat members, beneficiaries and villagers from the selected districts of Arunachal Pradesh.

**Table 1.1** Sampling of respondents

Categories of Respondents	Lower Subansiri	Papum Pare	Lohit	West Kameng	Tirap	Upper Subansiri	Total
Villagers	10	10	10	10	10	10	60
Beneficiaries	10	10	10	10	10	10	60
Panchayat members	10	10	10	10	10	10	60
Total Respondents	30	30	30	30	30	30	180

Source: made by the author

## Challenges

The rural development programmes in Arunachal Pradesh initiated by the government in 1952, during the First Five Year Plan, which the government of India launched, the National Extension Service (NES) by selecting 55 NES projects in the country including in Arunachal Pradesh the then North East Frontier Agency (NEFA) in order to look into the developmental activities of rural areas. Whereas, during Third Five Year Plan, the concept of rural development programme was redesigned from NES projects to Community Development Programme. Meanwhile, in order to get more cooperation from the village people and to bring more development in the villages, the Community Development Programme was converted into the Community Development Blocks<sup>3</sup>. However, the programme could not success to a great extent because of the lack of people's participation in it. It was followed by a series of development programmes, but it continued to be a dearth of people's participation.

The urgent need for the rapid development of the North East Frontier Agency (NEFA) was felt after the Chinese aggression of 1962. Prior to Chinese aggression in India towards the strategic parts of Arunachal Pradesh, the then North East Frontier Agency, the government of India had followed the Nehruvian policy for this area. The basic objectives of Nehruvian policy were to protect the identity of the tribes and to maintain the policy of isolationism. However, in the aftermath of Chinese attacked at this part of India, it was realized that India's defeat in the war was due to lack of development in terms of road, communication and other facilities in the Frontier state. Meanwhile, the Administration of NEFA had adopted the objectives to bring the area into the national mainstream and to motivate the people to take interest in developmental activities. Therefore, the first step towards realizing these objectives was to appoint a four-member committee, popularly known as Dying Ering committee to look into the development of local self-government in NEFA<sup>4</sup>. The committee strongly recommended for the

all India pattern of administration and suggested a four-tier popular body for the development of NEFA. Subsequently, the President of India promulgated the Panchayati Raj Regulation, 1967 in North East Frontier Agency. As a result, North East Frontier Agency Panchayati Raj Regulation, 1967 was framed and came into force in 1969 on the basis of Dying Ering Committee recommendations. The basic objective of the Regulation was to modernize the political structure and political culture of the state so as to bring it to the pattern prevalent in the other parts of the country and to involve the local people in development process of the state<sup>5</sup>.

For effective implementation of rural development programmes and to replace the NEFA Panchayati Raj Regulation, 1967 by a comprehensive law, the Arunachal Pradesh Panchayati Raj ordinance, 1994 was passed. The Governor reserved the 1994 ordinance, passed by the state legislative Assembly for the assent of the President of India. However, in 1996 the same ordinance was returned to the state government along with some suggestions. Meanwhile, by taking into considerations of the suggestions made by the President of India, the state legislative assembly passed the new Arunachal Pradesh Panchayati Raj Bill 1997, but without including the suggestion made for the provision of reservation of seats for the scheduled caste<sup>6</sup>. Subsequently, the government of India introduced the 86<sup>th</sup> constitutional Amendment Bill, 1999 which provides for the exemption of reservation of seats for the scheduled caste. It states that “Nothing in Article 243(d), relating to reservation of seats for Scheduled castes, shall apply to the state of Arunachal Pradesh”. Therefore, in the year 2000, the parliament passed the Bill in the form of 83<sup>rd</sup> constitutional Amendment Act, and in April 2001, the Arunachal Pradesh Panchayati Raj Act 1997 was formally apprised<sup>7</sup>.

The Arunachal Pradesh Panchayati Raj Act, 1997 is considered as a landmark step in the framework of the Arunachal Pradesh Panchayati Raj institution. It has brought more representation to the backward sections and socially disadvantaged sections particularly women in the village of Arunachal Pradesh. Further, the Panchayati Raj bodies of Arunachal Pradesh have been revitalized through this Act in order to bring better developmental activities in rural area of Arunachal Pradesh.

There are some issues in the study that lot of money is spent on developmental schemes by the government and Panchayats which led to entry of political parties in the village politics through Panchayat elections. As a result, in many villages polarization has taken place on party lines which led to the creation of political rivalries among the clan and the community. The traditional village council is being marginalized due to coming of Panchayat system. Proper devolution of power is not given to the local Government for discharging their duties towards the administration of the rural areas. The political leaders of the high order have been controlling the financial powers and the bureaucrats always intervene in the administration of rural areas.

Though, women participation in village politics after the enactment of 73<sup>rd</sup> Amendment Act has made a significant development, it has been found that there is still lack of women representation in the village politics particularly at the higher level of Panchayat bodies because most of the women have

limited themselves within the bound of 33 per cent reservation of seats to the Panchayat body. It has also been reported that still some of the women Panchayat members are working on the advice of male members of the family.

### Suggestions

Keeping in mind with various challenges at Grass-root politics some suggestions have been given for further strengthening the Panchayati Raj institutions and for achieving the objectives of the rural development. These suggestions are based on the findings of the study and researcher's personal field experience. Some of the suggestions are as follows:

1. Proper devolution of power and function should be entrusted to the Panchayats by removing the governmental controls. Particularly, the devolution of 3Fs (Function, Fund and Functionaries) to the Panchayat bodies should be taken place for effective working of Panchayats for rural development.
2. Practice of corruption should be eradicated completely in order to bring development and transparency in the Panchayati Raj system.
3. Any governmental Guidelines pertinent to developmental activities should be made available and every developmental activity should be undertaken on the basis of Guidelines.
4. Participation of women is equally important to usher rural development. Therefore, there is a need to eradicate any social restriction which impedes women participation. The family members and society as a whole should support women representatives. However, the tendency of women Panchayat members working on the advice of male members of the family should not be encouraged.
5. Comprehensive training programmes should be made mandatory for all the elected grassroots leaders to improve competency and capacity in bringing village development.
6. In order to eradicate the ignorance notion, there is a need to spread awareness.
7. The role of education is immense in every aspect of life. Therefore, the elected grassroots leaders need to be at least literate so that they can impart knowledge to the villagers about various governmental Guidelines of development schemes as well as provisions of the Panchayati Raj Act.

## Results and discussion

In order to understand people's perceptions of grass-root politics, the respondents were asked to give their opinion on the following set of questions:

- I. Do you know about Rural Local Self-government?
- II. Do you agree that Panchayati Raj representatives forestall the people's participations in village politics?
- III. Do you think Panchayats have brought changes in the traditional political institutions?
- IV. Do you think proper devolution of power has given to the local Government?

The response to these questions has been tabulated in table 1.2, 1.3, 1.4 and 1.5.

**Table 1.2 Response patterns of Respondents to the question-“Do you know about Rural Local Self-government?”**

Sl.No	Categories of Respondent	Yes	No	Total
1.	Villagers	53 (88.33%)	7 (11.66%)	60 (100%)
2.	Beneficiaries	58 (96.66%)	2 (3.33%)	60 (100%)
3.	Panchayat members	60 (100%)	0 (0.00%)	60 (100%)
	Total	171 (95%)	9 (5%)	180 (100%)

Source: Field survey by the researcher.

**YES: 95%**

**NO: 5%**

The data presented in the table 1.2 reveals that 95 percent of the total respondents are aware of the rural local self-government. However, out of the total respondents, 5 percent of the respondents are still not aware of what the rural local self government is.

**Table 1.3 Response patterns of Respondents to the question-“Do you agree that Panchayati Raj representatives forestall the people’s participations in village politics?”**

Sl.No	Categories of Respondent	Yes	No	Don't know	Total
1.	Villagers	33 (55%)	5 (11.42%)	22 (14.28%)	60 (100%)
2.	Beneficiaries	32 (82.85%)	8 (8.33%)	20 (36.66%)	60 (100%)
3.	Panchayat members	58 (96.66%)	0 (0.00%)	2 (3.33%)	60 (100%)
	Total	123 (68.33%)	13 (7.22%)	44 (24.44%)	180 (100%)

Source: Field survey by the researcher.

**YES: 68.33%**

**NO: 7.22%**

**DON'T KNOW: 24.44%**

The data presented in the above table reveals that more than half (68.33%) of the respondents have agreed that Panchayati Raj forestall the people’s participation in the village politics. Only 7.22 per cent of the total respondents do not agree that Panchayati Raj forestall the people’s participation in developmental process and about 24.44 per cent are not been able to clearly express their views whether Panchayati Raj forestall the people’s participation in the developmental process or not.

**Table 1.4 Response patterns of the respondents to the question- “Do you think**

**Panchayats have brought changes in the traditional political institutions?”**

Sl.No	Categories of respondents	Yes	No	Don't know	Total
1.	Villagers	31 (51.66%)	19 (31.66%)	10 (16.66%)	60 (100%)
2.	Beneficiaries	34 (56.66%)	17 (28.33%)	9 (15%)	60 (100%)
3.	Panchayat members	48 (80%)	10 (16.66%)	2 (3.33%)	60 (100%)
	Total	113 (62.77%)	46 (25.55%)	21 (11.66%)	180 (100%)

Source: Field survey by the researcher.

**YES: 62.77%**

**NO: 25.55%**



**DON'T KNOW: 11.66%**

It is seen from the above table that more than half (62.77%) of the total respondents have accepted that Panchayats have brought changes in the traditional political institution. While 25.55 per cent of the respondents have not accepted that Panchayats have brought changes in the traditional political institution and about 11.66 per cent of the respondents have said that they don't know whether Panchayati Raj has brought changes in the traditional political institution or not.

Thus, from the above table it is clear that more than half per cent of the total respondents think that Panchayats have brought changes in the traditional political institution.

**Table: 1.5 Response patterns of the respondents to the question- "Do you think proper devolution of power has been entrusted to the local Government"?**

Sl.No	Categories of Respondent	Yes	No	Don't know	Total
1.	Villagers	12 (20%)	28 (46.66%)	20 (33.33%)	60 (100%)
2.	Beneficiaries	12 (20%)	30 (50%)	18 (30%)	60 (100%)
3.	Panchayat members	0 (0.00%)	60 (100%)	0 (0.00%)	60 (100%)
	Total	24 (13.33%)	118 (65.55%)	38 (21.11%)	180 (100%)

Source: Field survey by the researcher.

**YES: 13.33%**

**NO: 65.55%**

**DON'T KNOW: 21.11%**

The data presented in the Table 1.5 reveals that out of the total respondents, 13.33 percent of respondents have agreed that proper devolution of power has been entrusted to the local government. Whereas 65.55 percent of respondents have said that proper devolution of power is not given to the local government for discharging their duties towards the administration of rural areas and 21.11 percent of the respondents couldn't give their views.

Thus, in the table 1.5, the responses of all the respondents- Villagers, Beneficiaries and Panchayat members clearly reveal that proper devolution of power has not been entrusted to the local government for discharging their duties towards the administration of rural areas.

## Conclusion

The Panchayati Raj institution has given a new orientation to the politics in Arunachal Pradesh. It has been the first modern political institution in Arunachal Pradesh. It contributes a solid foundation for designing the political process in Arunachal Pradesh and modernizing the tribal society as a whole. However, there are still some challenges which must be taken into consideration for the meaningful working of Panchayati Raj system.

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