

Panchayati Raj and Rural Development in India

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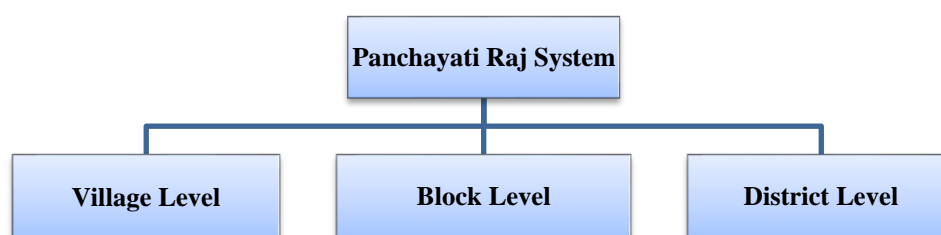
Abstract : Panchayati Raj Institutions – the grass-roots units of self-government – have been proclaimed as the vehicles of socio-economic transformation in rural India. Effective and meaningful functioning of these bodies would depend on active involvement, contribution and participation of its citizens both male and female. Gandhiji's dream of every village being a republic and Panchayats having powers has been translated into reality with the introduction of the three-tier Panchayati Raj system to enlist people's participation in rural reconstruction. Balwant Rai Mehta committee in 1957 was set up to examine self - governing institutions at village level. In 1958, Panchayati Raj was suggested in the Committee's report. With the ratification of the Constitution (73rd Amendment) Act 1992 and the Constitution (74th Amendment) Act 1992, local self government both rural and urban have been given constitutional identification in our country and it is the third layer of government, the first two being the Central and the State government. April 24, 1993 is a landmark day in the history of Panchayati Raj in India as on this day the Constitution (73rd Amendment) Act, 1992 came into force to provide constitutional status to the Panchayati Raj institutions.

Keywords: Panchayati Raj, Human Resource Development, Organic farming, Gram Sabha.

I. INTRODUCTION

During the days of Aryans, Indian villages had a unique institution called Panchayats, very powerful, well accepted and almost independent institutions. After the independence, all possible measures were taken to revive the Panchayati Raj Institutions in order to involve the rural people not only in their own development but also in the development of the nation as a whole. Gandhiji was of the opinion that for actual development of the country, every village has to be self reliant and capable of managing its affairs. According to him, Gram Panchayats should be entrusted even with the dispensation of justice. The poor villagers need not go into the courts, spend hard earned money and waste weeks and months in towns for litigation. Although this was not practicable in 1947, the Constituent Assembly saw merit in Gandhiji's argument of democratic decentralized governance and included Panchayati Raj under the Directive Principles of State Policy. According Article 40, Directive Principles of State policy of our Constitution states, "The State shall take steps to organize village Panchayats and endow them with such powers and authority as may be necessary to enable them to function as units of Local Self-Government." To give effect to this Directive Principle, the Parliament passed The Constitution (73rd Amendment) Act, 1992 which established a Panchayat Raj system in rural areas and The Constitution (74th Amendment) Act, 1992 to establish Municipalities system in urban areas.

II. THREE TIER STRUCTURE OF PANCHAYATI RAJ



It is a three - tier system of rural self government as given below :

2.1 Gram Panchayat

Gram Panchayat are local governments at the stage of villages and small towns. In reality the Gram Panchayat is the base of the Panchayati system in India. A Gram Panchayat is shaped in a village which has a population of 300 or more or else two or more villages are clubbed together. Sarpanch heads a Gram Panchayat.

The functions of Gram Panchayat includes

- Providing sufficient water supply.
- Maintenance of village roads.
- Making the arrangement of lights on village roads.
- Public health, hygiene and sanitation.
- Development of agricultural activities, etc.

2.2 Panchayat Samiti

Every district is separated into a number of Blocks consisting of some neighbouring villages. For each Block, there shall be one Panchayat Samiti of which the Block Development Officer (BOD) will take steps as ex-officio Executive Officer.

2.3 Zilla Parishad

Zilla Parishad looks after the administration of rural areas in a district. The officer of the Zilla Parishad is positioned in the district headquarters. The main function of this governing body revolves around providing the crucial facilities to the rural people and to commence the developing programmes in the village.

III. SALIENT FEATURES OF THE PANCHAYATI RAJ SYSTEM

- To provide 3-tier system of Panchayati Raj for all States.
- To hold Panchayat elections regularly every 5 years.
- To provide reservation of seats for Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and women (not less than 33%).
- To appoint State Finance Commission to make recommendations with regard to the financial powers of the Panchayats.
- To constitute District Planning Committee to prepare draft development plan for the district as a whole.

IV. POWERS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

According to the Constitution, Panchayats shall be given powers and authority to function as institutions of self-government. The following powers and responsibilities are to be delegated to Panchayats at the appropriate level.

- Preparation of plan for economic development and social justice.
- Implementation of schemes for economic development and social justice in relation to 29 subjects given in Eleventh Schedule of the Constitution.
- To levy and collect appropriate taxes, duties, tolls and fees.

V. SIGNIFICANCE OF PANCHAYATI RAJ SYSTEM

5.1 Reservations for Women

73rd Amendment of the Constitution in the year 1992 reserved 33% seats for women in Panchayats. This provision is a major move towards strengthening the position of rural women. The introduction of women in sizable numbers into the new Panchayat could bring significant changes in the functioning of these grass-root level institutions. Involvement of women in the Panchayati Raj Institutions is expected to bring qualitative change in the matters relating to health, nutrition, children welfare, family care, drinking water etc.

5.2 Reservations for SC/ST

Dec. 24, 1996, the Panchayat network has been extended to the tribal areas of the country. The provisions of the Panchayats (extension to the schedule areas) Act 1996, extends Panchayats to the tribal areas of Andhra Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Gujarat, Himachal Pradesh, Jharkhand, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Orissa and Rajasthan. The reservation for SC/ST is another significant aspect for development of disadvantaged groups in the rural areas.

5.3 Human Resource Development

Panchayati Raj Institution ensures development of human resources by providing opportunities like education, training, basic health services necessary for growth and development to weak and under privileged. It also ensures that all the sections of the society particularly weaker section including women and girl child gets adequate opportunity for developing human resource potential. Panchayat can play a major role in development of human resource for weaker section by disseminating information on special development programmes for them. Voluntary groups and local agencies should be encouraged by PRIs in effective implementation of human resource development programmes.

5.4 Social Mobilization

Panchayati Raj system has provided avenues for facilitating people's participation at the grass-root level in the following ways:

- a. Gram Sabha will provide an open forum for discussion on various village level development activities thereby ensuring peoples' participation.
- b. Representation of weaker sections in the decision making process.
- c. Empowering rural women through an induction of 1/3 reservation in the Panchayati Raj bodies.

5.5 Role of Gram Sabha

According to Article 234 B of the Constitution, Gram Sabha means a body consisting of persons registered in the electoral rolls of a village within the area of Gram Panchayat- As per Article 243 A, a Gram Sabha may exercise such powers and perform such functions at the village, as the legislature of a State, according to the law. Accordingly all villagers over 18 years of age, have an inherent right to determine their own destiny. This is the forum where even a poor villager can make his presence felt. Gram Sabha plays very important role in functioning of the Gram Panchayats in ensuring transparency in the working and equitable distribution of benefits in creation of community assets and bringing about social involvement in the developmental process.

5.6 Implementation of Different schemes

Through Gram Panchayats, activities in MGNREGS are handed out and auditing of work is done. MGNREGS has brought a sigh of relief for rural populace. As rural distress was brewing due to unemployment. MGNREGS has become a cog in the wheel of growth and development. Gram Sabha as a pivotal body is involved for building infrastructure and providing employment to people in rural areas. Many State and Central Government schemes have been implemented at the grass root level by these bodies. Schemes of rural housing (Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana, Gramin), Rural electrification schemes (Gramin Vidyut Abhiyantas), Health and sanitation (ICDS and Swachh Bharat Mission), Physical infrastructure (Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana) etc have made conspicuous difference in rural areas.

5.7 Agricultural Reforms

In the field of agriculture, these bodies have contributed enormously. Awareness about organic farming, soil health card scheme has been implemented with the help of Gram Sabha. Similarly, many infrastructure projects, animal husbandry activities, fisheries etc have been carried out by these bodies. Cooperatives like AMUL were conceived at these levels. Therefore, pooling of resources and efforts have been their hallmark. Similarly, concepts of social forestry, agro-forestry has been encouraged by panchayats.

5.8 Growth of Small Scale Industry

Panchayats have mandate to make plans and implement them in areas of small scale industries, food processing industries, khadi and cottage industries. These industries require proper planning and financing. With coordination among Central, State and Panchayat level bodies it will help in realising the full potential.

VI. CONCLUSION

Thus, the Panchayat System in India assumes a very significant role. This system is quite rational practicable and in perfect harmony with the spirit of democracy and should be further strengthened and encouraged. It should be made economically viable and self-sufficient by providing adequate resources, funds and generous grants. The reservation of seats for women, Scheduled Castes and Tribes in Panchayats is a welcome step, for it would make the institution of Panchayat more democratic, representative and balanced. The Panchayat elections are conducted and supervised by the Election Commission to ensure free and fair elections. All these measures ensure a bright and long lasting future of Panchayat System in India.

VII. REFERENCES

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