



The Resuscitation And Revival Of Panchayati Raj In India

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Abstract

The Panchayati Raj system as the Local self-governance in a democratic system was formulated by our constitution makers. If we go back to human history, Panchayat will be revealed to be the most fundamental unit of democracy. In the views of Mahatma Gandhi, "Indian Independence must be at the bottom and every village ought to be a Republic with Panchayat, having powers." The Panchayati Raj system, which stretches back to ancient times and has survived in Sultanate, Mughal, and even British invasion and control in India, has been accorded a legitimate position in the directive principle of state policy in Article 40 of the Indian constitution. As a result of this, the Panchayati Raj system was first introduced in the Nagaur district of Rajasthan in 1959 to ensure the participation of the people in the democratic process. Through this paper, an attempt was made to analysis the evolution and revival of the Panchayati Raj system in India.

Keywords: Panchayati Raj, self-governance, constitution, Independence, participation, democratic process.

Introduction

The institution of Panchayati Raj is as old as human civilization. It has been in existence since ancient times. This is an early concept of democracy in the history of human civilization. If we look back in the political history of human civilization, we will find that the village panchayat was the basic unit of democracy. Panchayati Raj is the cornerstone of India's social and economic development in the 21st century. Panchayati Raj was introduced to give impetus to the development of programme's initiated in rural areas. The promoters of Panchayati Raj hoped that if the representatives of the local people were involved in the developmental administration, there would be better participation of the people in the implementation of the programmes. Hence, they have assigned an important role to the non-officials in Panchayati Raj and all the

important decisions in these bodies are now taken by them. Among non-officials, the political executive, such as refers to the elected executives such as the President of the Zilla Parishad, the President of the Panchayat Samiti and the Sarpanch of the Gram Panchayat, playing a major role. India has adopted a decentralized strategy in its local governance system with a more proactive and area-based approach to rural development through the 73rd Constitutional Amendment in 1992. It occupies a very important place in the 11th Schedule of the Constitution. Panchayati Raj institutions in rural areas reflect India's experimentation with direct democracy at the grassroots. The present three-tier system was the brainchild of Balwant Rai Mehta Committee, in 1957. Considers the ideal formulation of the Indian Constitution. An aspirational level for both the institutions and functionaries of Panchayati Raj provides a measuring rod to evaluate their performance and contribute to improving their level of functioning.

Panchayati Raj in Ancient Times

Panchayat is made up of two words, "Panch and Ayat." The term Panch means 'five' Pancha's is a group of five people who settle disputes. The term 'Ayat' refers to a location, a residence, or a home. Panchayat in this context refers to a meeting venue for Panchas to arbitrate. As a result, panchayats have served as dispute resolution centres (Kumar, 2009). The decentralized governing structure known as panchayats can be seen throughout Indian history. It was a tried-and-true method that worked well. Panchayats aided in the administration of justice, the resolution of conflicts, and the resolution of day-to-day issues. Since Vedic times, the village has been recognised as India's main unit of administration and justice. Village administration's responsibilities in ancient polities included managing tanks, meadows, temples, marketplaces, justice, and taxation, among other things. The headman, Gramik and Gramini, were in charge of the village panchayat (Jayaswal, 2013). The village was mentioned as the basic administrative unit of Gramini. Village chiefs (Bhojak) collected state revenues to organize constructive programs. Villages exercised self-government (Malaviya, 1956, p.)

Similarly, allusions to a village and a district can be found in the Maurya and Gupta periods, respectively (Mookerji, 2018). Kautilya, Chandragupta's renowned minister, discussed village governance in detail in his classic work the Arthashastra. He was a prominent king's supporter, but he was not opposed to local sovereignty. During this time, "the village headman was called Gramik and was appointed by the king." He remained the king's most powerful counsellor and he was frequently consulted by him about rural matters. Villages were classified according to their population under the Kautilya system, with villages ranging in size from 100 to 500 families. Their responsibilities were delegated, resulting in the development of numerous administrative positions in the community. The Village's Gramik (headman) was in charge of collecting state dues, as well as reporting and controlling the activities of criminals (Jain, 1980). During this time, panchayats organised public works, education, and conflict resolution between communities (Sekar, 2008)."

During the Mauryas and post-Mauryan times, the headman with the help of the elder's council, was in charge. It remained a significant part of local life. During the Gupta dynasty, the district official was referred to as the Grampati, however, there were some variations in the terminology. The mature males of the village gathered for the village meeting. The village headman was occasionally helped by the Mahattaras, a group of chosen elders. These assemblies established many committees to handle various parts of village governance, such as tanks, temples, justice, roads, gardens, education, and so on (Mookerji, 2018).

The Gupta inscription paints a vivid picture of local and provincial governments. Their governance was divided into Bhukti (Provinces under the command of a Uparika) and Visayas (Districts under the command of a Visayapati). Visaya was split into Vithis (small cities) and Vithis (villages) in eastern India. However, this pattern predominated mostly in Gupta Kings-controlled areas. Different fiscal and administrative systems prevailed in different sections of India. The Sreni or Nigma system dominated the Gupta era. Gradually, a feudal structure arose with many degrees of power throughout society. However, the village remained the fundamental unit of the social, economic, political, and administrative systems, which were all significant aspects of the government system. The Nigma system (guild) was widespread throughout the Gupta dynasty. Northern India was ruled by the great king Harsha after the Guptas. During this time, the Grama was the smallest administrative entity (village). Grameyka or Gramadhayaksha, the village headman was in charge of local government. Local concerns were handled by the village government. Some popular panchayats and courts tried all civil and criminal cases with the support of village elders (Mathew, 1995). Thus, there was a well-established local government system in ancient India, which followed a set pattern of tradition and traditions (Sharda, 2010). The state operated independently of village panchayats never interfering in their work. However, it's worth noting that the woman isn't referred to as a Gramini nor is she mentioned as a panchayat member. Even though women had equal status and actively participated in family and social matters in the early Vedic period, women's engagement in government in ancient polities was insignificant.

Panchayati Raj System during the Medieval and Mugul Period

The Middle Age covers roughly the period from 100 to 1700 AD. The first phase of this medieval period (i.e., 100-1500 AD) was a time of political instability, frequent foreign invasions and atrocities by the invaders. Early invasions of India were directed at capturing wealth rather than achieving political sovereignty. Even during the Sultanate, there was a Panchayat system at the village level which took care of education, sanitation, etc. and acted as a legal body to settle disputes. Villagers formed a small "commonwealth" and ran their own affairs. The Delhi Sultanate was essentially a military feudal state. It had all the legislative, legal, executive and administrative powers. There were no representative institutions. There were no institutions that were representative of the people. The Sultan's will be the rule of law. Village communities continued to function following their traditional customs under the Sultanate of Delhi, with their headman known as Magaddam or Mukhia and accountant known as Patwari, and the government dealt with the peasants through the headman. Mughal rulers superseded Hindu pujas with the arrival of Muslims.

Their feudalistic mindset and need for more state funds led them to centralise the administration. They devised a new land-use policy. All territory throughout their empire was managed by a single unified revenue system under this approach. There were no institutions that could be considered representative. The law was the Sultan's wish. Under the Sultanate, village communities continued to function according to their old customs, and the government dealt with the peasants through the headman, known as Magaddam or Mukhia. Mughal monarchs took over from Hindu pujas when Muslims arrived. Their feudalistic mentality, as well as their desire to increase the state's financial resources, drove them to centralise the government. A new land policy was devised. All of the land within their dominion was governed by a single central revenue system under this approach. The centrally appointed Subedars, Malguzars, Muqaddams and Patwaris were put in charge of the provinces, districts and villages. The provinces, which were subdivided into districts, which were further broken into smaller units, were at the top of the Delhi Sultanate's hierarchy (Srivastava, 1972). The hamlet was the lowest level of government, as it was self-sufficient. A village assembly akin to the Panchayat of North India was held in every hamlet. Village administration was maintained through hereditary posts such as village accountant and village watchman. Land grants and a share of the agricultural production were given to the village watchman and officials. The Delhi Sultanate's hierarchy was split into provinces, which were subdivided into districts, which were then subdivided into smaller units. The village was the most basic form of administration and was self-sufficient. A village assembly, comparable to the Panchayat in North India, exists in each hamlet. The hamlet was still administered by hereditary authorities such as the village accountant and village watchman. The village watchman and officers were compensated with a share of the agricultural production and land grants. The hamlet was in contact with the central administration through an official known as Mahanayakcharya, who was in charge of the community's administration (Pramanik, 2007). The local government structure was of little relevance to Muslim kings. However, to generate cash, the rulers focused on developing agriculture in the village. They provided financial assistance to local bodies on occasion for this reason. The village Panchayats were given great consideration by the central government. The king gave great attention to the institutions of Panchayati Raj and the village Panchayat consisting of five or more people and continued to keep a close eye on breaches of time-honoured practices, to secure order and cooperation to settle petty disputes. The revenue system and its collection were largely unchanged. Apart from that, Panchayats and Villages had a role in the system (Srivastava, 1972).

Village governance was efficient throughout the early Mughal dynasty. There were well-organized village communities that ran their operations along domestic lines. It was because the Mughal rulers were preoccupied with establishing themselves and conquering other empires at the outset. They had no desire to meddle with the country's governance and organisation. When the Muslim monarchs gained control, they implemented the Jagir System and began collecting revenue through Malguzar or contractors. The hamlet was maintained in touch with the central authority by an officer known as the Mahanayakcharya, who was in charge of the community's governance. Village governance was effective throughout the early Mughal dynasty. Village communities were well-organized and ran their affairs on a home level. Because the Mughal emperors were preoccupied with establishing themselves and conquering other states at the outset, they had

little desire to interfere with the country's administration and organisation. When the Muslim rulers had established their control, they instituted the Jagir system and began collecting taxes through Malguzar or contractors. As a result, the Mughal Empire was not completely Indian. It was an amalgamation of Indian and Arabic systems. Muslim monarchs attempted to maintain the traditional structure of local administration. However, the monarchs prioritised agricultural development in the communities. They occasionally provided financial assistance to local bodies for this reason. The Panchayats of villages were given considerable consideration by the federal government. Village autonomy was preserved, and a village Panchayat of five or more people continued to monitor infractions of time-honoured customs, maintain order and Mughal cooperation, and resolve small disputes. The king paid close attention to the Panchayati Raj institutions. The Panchayat system was important even during the Sultanate period, functioning in sectors like education, sanitation, and the court, among others. The villages were controlled by their Panchayats throughout the Mughal Empire, notably under the leadership of Sher Shah. The Panchayat was mostly made up of local elders who served the people by administering justice. The village headman had served as a liaison between the village Panchayat and higher-level authorities. The national or provincial administration did not interfere with the Panchayat's administrative responsibilities at the time, save in emergencies. With the loss of Mughal dominance and the entrance of British control in India, the village administrative system began to unravel (Sekar, 2008).

Panchayati Raj System during the British Period

Panchayati Raj was quite strong and vibrant on the eve of British rule when the British took over the administration of the country. Several officials underlined the strange nature of the Panchayati Raj on the eve of the British conquest. Elphinstone said: "When other governments retire, they contain in miniature all the material of the country. Although they are not to be compared with a very good government, they are an excellent remedy against the imperfections of a bad government." But they have the evil effects of imprudence and weakness even against tyranny and cruelty (Forest:1884). With the advent of the British, the self-sufficient village communities and their panchayats could no longer sustain themselves. Over time, they were replaced by formally established village administrations. It is a historical fact that local government in India in the sense of a responsible representative assembly was a British creation. Village panchayat was not a priority of the British rulers. They mainly focused on commercial centres and their interest was initially limited to the creation of local bodies of appointed members in large cities. 1687 A municipal corporation modelled after the British Municipal Council was established in Madras (Mathew: 1995). This authority was established to collect tax on the construction of guild buildings and schools. A report by the Congress Gram Panchayat Samiti stated that "The excessive greed of the British East India Company caused the slow but steady disintegration of the panchayat in these villages. The deliberate introduction of the Zamindari and Ryotwari systems against the village system of Mahalwari management caused near destruction. The commercial life of village communities." The excessive centralization of executive and judicial power in the hands of state officials deprived the people of their power and influence. The village is still the main administrative unit. The work system of the administration was changed. Old village elders (Gramini) and accountants became paid civil servants; therefore, the village government lost

its share of the domestic revenue, and their leaders were also demoted to salaried civil servants in the field of law. It also destroyed the indigenous system and established regular courts covered with tables, influencing even the most remote villages (Singh: 1997). The East India Company's charter was the subject of a magnificently evocative letter from Metcalfe in 1761 to the Select Parliamentary Committee in 1832:

“The village communities are little republics, having nearly everything they can want within themselves and almost independent of any foreign relations. They seem to last where nothing else lasts. Dynasty after dynasty tumbles down; revolution succeeds to revolution, Hindu, Pathan, Mugul, Mahratta, Sikh, English, are all masters in turn, but the village community remains the same. This union of the village communities, each one forming a separate state in itself, has, I conceive, contributed more than any other cause to the preservation of the people of India through all the revolutions and changes which they have suffered, and is in a high degree conducive to their happiness, and to the enjoyment of a great portion of freedom and independence (Bates:2005).”

Karl Marx adopted the same phrase and used it to explain what he believed to be one of the defining characteristics of the communities that existed under “Oriental despotism.” In Henry Maine's influential *Ancient Law* (1861), he sets out to describe the historical evolution of legal systems, linking these systems to what he saw as the many stages in the progress of Civilization. Maine is trying to refute the Roman school of law, represented by Austin. This idea was further emphasised in the writings of Baden-Powell and others (*The Indian Village Community*), and it eventually formed one of the pillars of the indirect rule theory that was created in India in the second half of the nineteenth century and spread to other British colonial territories. In the eyes of these later colonial administrators, the primary benefit of the concept of the village community and its Panchayat, or council of elders, was that it purported to be a natural and customary source of authority upon whom the government could legitimately delegate certain responsibilities, thereby avoiding the costs of a minute and detailed system of law enforcement while also avoiding the time-consuming and contentious business of holding elections. With the establishment of Municipal Boards in 1882 to run those towns big enough to have a magistrate, a form of democratic local government was eventually also implemented (Kumar: 2009). However, in many rural areas of India, the local community and its panchayat continued to serve as a first port of call in the event of a disagreement, at least practically if not legally. But in 1920, after the Montagu-Chelmsford report from 1918 and the Royal Commission's report on decentralisation, the nettle was once more gripped, and local Panchayats were legally granted legal authority in no fewer than five provinces, including the Punjab, Central Provinces, and UP. The majority of official critics agreed that, by this time, the ‘old’ village groups Metcalfe had written about were all but extinct, if they had ever existed at all (Khanna: 2006). This move was motivated by legitimate practical considerations. Any sceptics could be dispelled by pointing to the 1911 census, in which village committees were specifically sought out and counted. The census concluded that “the ‘myth’ surrounding them had probably arisen from the fact that a village is generally, if not always, formed by members of the same caste and that caste frequently had their own panchayats, even though the village might not.” Nevertheless, the different provincial administrations went ahead and formally granted village committees a combination of administrative and judicial powers. The desire to reduce the burden on the overworked district and

provincial courts was a major driving force behind the panchayat initiative. Additionally, it was hoped that by giving villages authority and eliminating the overeducated (and increasingly problematic) class of collaborators on whom the British relied for much of their administration, the white rulers would strengthen their ties to their devoted people. From one Province to the next, these village committees' makeup and the authority they wielded varied greatly. Though in UP all elections by the Gram Sabha had to be authorised by the local magistrate, the majority were democratically elected. Even while it wasn't quite a 'conventional' form of selection, this process at least had the advantage of being local and including some sort of oversight. They were all primarily established to conduct court activity. Panchayats were established along the length of the country in the Bengal and Madras presidencies, and they covered roughly one-tenth or one-fifth of the countryside in Punjab, Bombay, and the Central Provinces. In UP, they were given control over one-fourth of the province. While initially seeing some degree of success (the Bengal panchayats resolved roughly 122,760 cases in 1925), the situation went on to steadily deteriorate, in part due to the fact that, as previously said, their jurisdiction was all too easily circumvented by turning to a British court. Ironically, it was at this same time, when the British were cynically promoting the Panchayati system and legitimising its function, that the Panchayati idea also made its way into nationalist rhetoric. However, the Panchayat was more than just a convenient and affordable method of indirect authority to nationalists. Instead, it served as a representation of the kind of democratic government that Mahatma Gandhi and others wanted to replace the European system with when India gained independence. Gandhi, of course, had a good education and was greatly influenced by many Western authors, including Leo Tolstoy, whose idea of a self-sufficient community he adopted. In a plea to the Natal Assembly in 1894, he argued that members of the Indian community should be granted the right to vote, drawing heavily on his study of Sir Henry Maine. Maine's Indian Village Communities served as one of the key pieces of evidence in this appeal. The Indian people have recognised and used the power of election since before the Anglo-Saxon races first learned about the ideas of representation, according to a crucial line in the petition. Your Petitioners humbly request that your Honourable Assembly take note of Sir Henry Summer Maine's Village Communities, in which he makes it abundantly obvious that the Indian tribes have been familiar with representative institutions virtually since the beginning of time. The Teutonic Mark wasn't quite as organised or fundamentally representational as an Indian village community before the precise technical Roman form was grafted onto it, according to that distinguished lawyer and author. Gandhi continued by quoting Chisolm Anstey, who called "the East, the parent of municipalities" and said that "local self-government in the widest sense of the term" was "as old as the East itself" in a speech he gave before the East Indian Association in London (Bates: 2005). Gandhi asserted at that time, somewhat imaginatively, that every caste in every hamlet or town has its own laws and regulations, elects members, and provides an exact pattern of the Saxon Witans, from which the current Parliamentary institutions sprang. There were other supporters of Panchayats besides Gandhi and the Indian National Congress. Many liberal colonial officials, especially those in the revenue and agricultural departments, shared their enthusiasm for the village, for cooperation, and for local self-government. They believed that "the intermediary classes," which included moneylenders and lawyer-politicians, were a burden on society and a hindrance to progress, especially in the advancement of revenue receipts. Both

Gandhi and the British expressed enthusiasm for the opportunities offered by cooperation, though neither advocated anything as radical as land reform because this would be too revolutionary. However, the cooperative movement was increasingly supported by the British in the 1920s as the Panchayat concept was supplanted by nationalist ideas. Panchayats weren't just supported by Gandhi and the Indian National Congress. Several liberal colonial officials, especially those in the revenue and agricultural departments, who saw the "intermediary classes," whether moneylenders or lawyer-politicians, as a drain on society and a hindrance to progress, particularly in the progress of the revenue receipts, shared the enthusiasm for the village, for cooperation, and for local self-government. Both Gandhi and the British expressed enthusiasm for the opportunities offered by cooperation, though neither advocated anything as radical as land reform because this would be too revolutionary. In the 1920s, as the Panchayat concept was being embraced by nationalists, the British began to support the cooperative movement more and more. Another "friend of the peasant" in this case, "Punjabi" Malcolm Darling, had a significant impact. Gandhi's goals for the concept of village self-government grew as the nationalist struggle went on. His 1942 description of "village swaraj," which closely resembled Metcalfe's, is the most concise and frequently quoted one of the concepts.

"My idea of village swaraj is that it is a complete republic, independent of its neighbours for its own vital wants and yet interdependent for many others in which dependence is a necessity... As far as possible every activity will be conducted on the co-operative basis. There will be no castes such as we have today, with their graded untouchability. Non-violence with its technique of satyagraha and non-co-operation will be the sanction of the village community. The government of the village will be conducted by a Panchayat of five persons elected annually by the adult villagers, male and female, possessing minimum prescribed qualifications... Since there will be no system of punishments in the accepted sense, this Panchayat will be the legislature, judiciary and executive combined to operate for its year of office. Here there is perfect democracy based upon individual freedom. The individual is the architect of his own government. The law of non-violence rules him and his government. He and his village are able to defy the might of a world. For the law governing every villager is that he will suffer death in the defence of his and his village's honour (Bates:2005)."

In The "Discovery of India" Jawaharlal Nehru expressed his support for the idea by stating that in earlier times, "the Village Panchayat or elected council possessed extensive powers both executive and Judicial and its members treated with great reverence by the Kings officers." But as far as Nehru's Congress policy was concerned, this was merely a historical fantasy with minimal real-world repercussions. In fact, he had discussions with P Thakur Das, G.D Birla, JRD Tata, and others shortly after he finished writing it that resulted in the creation of the renowned Bombay Plan in January 1944, which established the parameters for India's post-independence social and economic development: an era of industry, urbanisation, and joint ventures between the state and the national bourgeoisie (Bates:2005).

Development of Panchayati Raj after Post-Independence

After Gandhi's passing, the Indian Constituent Assembly debated, criticised, and rejected the idea of retaining the village Panchayat's judicial and administrative functions. This was done because, like the British before them, they believed that such local bodies were corruptible. One story claim that Ambedkar had a unique insight into this issue since he had witnessed the suffering of his own Mahar community. As a result, the 1951 Indian Constitution only made a passing mention of panchayats in Part IV (in the Directive Principles of State Policy), which is not subject to judicial review. Part IV (Article 40) simply stated that "The state should take steps to organise village panchayats and endow them with such power and authority as may be necessary to enable them to function as units of self-government."

The cooperative movement suffered the same fate. Following a brief burst of enthusiasm in the 1950s, cooperation was shown to be frequently a façade in practise, and the cooperative ideal along with the Panchayati ideal was put on hold by the majority of government agencies. The 1994 study of the Indian Social Science Institute, a significant source for this subject, poses the rhetorical question: "Why did the Panchayats not come under the legally enforceable provision of the constitution? The response is that "the urban and rural elites, their representatives in politics (from the national freedom movement onward), and a bureaucracy conditioned by its class nature, had a scorn for panchayat, and has ever since stayed intact," according to the statement. This contempt feels genuine enough. What is the village but a sink of localism, a den of ignorance, narrow-mindedness, and communalism? wrote BR Ambedkar in what has since become a famous quotation. What has happened since the 1950s, when men of this kind dominated political decision-making, to make the concept of Panchayati Raj once again fashionable? Financial forces similar to those that first made the Panchayati experiment popular in the 1930s are one possible explanation. The first five-year plan was launched, and soon after that, these pressures started to become apparent. It quickly became clear that the rural component of the government's development programme could not be implemented due to the focus of development resources on the industrial sector during the first and, in particular, the second five-year plan (Bates: 2005).

Panchayati Raj and Post-Independence Developments

The Etawah Project began in November of 1948. Mr. Albert Mayer, an accomplished urban planner from the United States, started it all. It encompasses 97 villages in the Mahewa district. Agriculture, animal husbandry, cooperation, irrigation, and the distribution of agricultural equipment are all included by this pilot project, as well as public works, environmental cleanliness, public health, women's employment, village involvement, including sightseeing, and adult literacy. Under the guidance of Mr. Albert Mayer, the pilot project is managed by a government agency created specifically for the purpose. The District Development Officer serves as the executive head, assisted by four gazetted officers known as Deputy Development Officers. Six Assistant Development Officers and 24 village staff report to them. The project authorities also use the regular stalls of provincial departments of cooperation, agriculture, development, yearly husbandry, public health, and others who work in the region. This Governmental machinery was cranked into action under the inspired leadership of Mr Mayer, who was able to liberate it from the coils of

red tape and get it to accomplish something that other Governmental entities across the country had glaringly failed to do (Ramabhai,1952).

The Etawah pilot project was primarily intended for rural and community development. To increase food production, the Food Comparing Enquiry Committee noted that in 1952, 55 Community Development Projects were established (Hazarika, 2006), which subsequently evolved into the Community Development Programme, which now covers the whole nation through its 5000 Community Development Blocks. The Nilokheri Experiment, started by S.K. Dey, focused on Agri Development, including Poultry, Piggery, Horticulture, and Small and Cottage Industries, as well as the construction of Polytechnics and Engineering Workshops. The success of this program stunned the Government of India and was praised as a shining example of rural development initiatives. Sarvodaya Yojana was created on Mahatma Gandhi's constructive goal and led by other prominent socialist leaders like as Vinoba Bhave and Jayaprakash Narayan. From 1948 to 1949, the state of Bombay took a keen interest in the plan. In order to instil habits of self-help, mutual aid, tolerance, and frugality among the people, the programme stressed cooperative concepts and methods in conducting Sarvodaya activities (Bates, The Development of Panchayati Raj in India, 2005). Indian authorities worked hard to implement the Constitution's goals via planning and community development (Juneja, 1973). The Planning Commission was created in March of 1950. This commission assigned new responsibilities to the Panchayats. The Ford Foundation pledged to assist India in improving the plight of the rural masses in 1951, through its president. Early in 1952, several projects began to function. India-US In January 1952, an agreement on technical cooperation was struck. Under this agreement, the National Extension Service, the country's first scientific and methodical community development programme, became a permanent agency. It establishes a fundamental organisational structure, including official and non-official roles, as well as a financial framework for development. A development block is a standardised unit of operation used by the CDP or NES. The Community Development Program (CDP) began on October 2, 1952, under the India-US Operational Agreement, with 55 community development initiatives. Each of the 55 projects was to be carried out over three development blocks, or 300 villages with a population of around three lakhs (Mandal, 2003).

A total of fifty community development projects were approved. People were quickly enthralled by the software, and requests to increase the number of blocks were made. Meanwhile, the earlier-formed committee published its report, emphasising the need for agricultural growth. However, it was claimed that agriculture cannot thrive until actions are done to improve rural India's socioeconomic situation. The CDP's expansion became increasingly crucial during this period. However, the government lacked the resources to increase the CDP. The Grow More Food Inquiry Committee proposed that National Extension Services be established, and the government agreed, and the National Extension Service was established on October 2, 1953. The two primary rural development initiatives at the time were the CDP and the NES. The main purpose of these two programmes was to make community development a short-term high-intensity phase of rural development, while the National Extension Services would be a long-term multi-functional extension organisation. Both programmes aimed to promote rural development as their major purpose. At the federal and state levels, both programmes were brought under the ministry's control (Bhatnagar, 1978).

Both initiatives were complimentary and ran at the same time. The original objective of the NES programme was to cover the entire country in ten years, or until 1963. According to the “First Five-Year Plan, community development is the approach and rural extension is the agency through which the Five-Year Plan attempts to begin the process of altering the village's social and economic existence.” In other words, “the CDP's main goal was to help the average man or woman realise their potential and organise themselves to work for the country's growth and advancement by utilising accessible technological information. Community development projects were initiated all around the country under ‘the First Five Year Plan’ (1951-56). The country was divided into different development zones. The block served as the program's governing unit. At the block level, all development activity began. Agricultural extension, road construction, animal husbandry, social education, and health programmes, as well as structures, were among the development activities carried out at the block level for rural rebuilding. The village development work was delegated to a Block Development Officer (BDO) at the block level, together with a staff of extension officers. They were given village staff and Sevikas to help them with their rural development projects (Mohindra Singh, 2005). With the support of Gram Panchayats, efforts were also made to engage the general population in these projects. There was a lot of excitement in the early years of the CDP, both among the public and among the government. However, after three to four years, it lost its original vigour and public engagement began to diminish (Srinivansan, 1962). The CDP gradually lost its original shape. It began as a citizen-led initiative with government support. As a result, it was turned into an official event with only a few individuals attending. Gram Panchayats were determined to be weak and ineffectual at motivating people to support the initiative. The block advisory group was unable to plan the programme and persuade individuals to passionately engage in the development initiatives. As a consequence, the village representative bodies and the block advisory body concluded that the programme had failed for the following reasons:

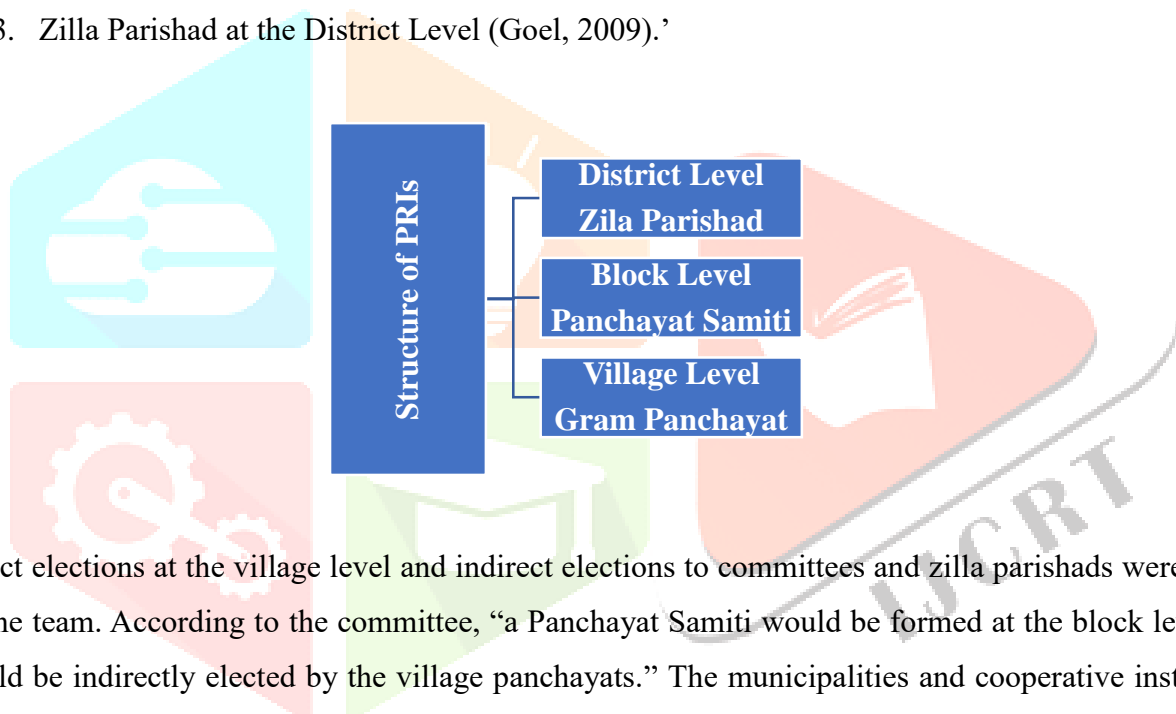
- a) “Too much emphasis on Shramdan (self-labour)
- b) Lack of consciousness among rural masses
- c) Lack of Financial resources
- d) In the training process, the wrong approach is taken.
- e) A lack of effective local leadership
- f) Neglect by political parties
- g) Lack of propaganda (Singh., 1971).”

As a result, the outcomes of these projects were unexpected. It was deemed that an assessment of the programme's performance was necessary, to identify problem areas that prevent CDP and NES goals from being met. As a result, in 1957, Balwant Rai Mehta led a Study Group for Community Projects and the National Extension Service, and the National Development Council constituted a Committee on Planning Projects. The study team was tasked with analysing if the CDP has been effective in developing institutions to harness local efforts and guaranteeing continuity in the socioeconomic reform process, among other things. In late 1957, the committee submitted its report. The Committee found that the CDP and NES failed to promote the programme while advancing local bodies from panchayat to higher levels, and that the CDP

and even the panchayats lacked passion in the region in any major way for community development (Projects, 1957).

Prior institutions lacked the features indicated by the Balwant Ra Mehta team. However, with the necessary organisational and functional reforms, it was decided that the Panchayat should serve as the cornerstone of our democracy as well as a community development agency. As a result, the Mehta Committee underlined the importance of power decentralisation to the grassroots, as well as the consolidation of power not just in the political, but also in the economic and administrative domains. The Committee recommended a three-tier structure of rural self-government to replace the present district boards, with indirect elections at each level and true devolution of authority and responsibility for planning and development operations at the state level. The three stages recommended were:

1. 'Gram Panchayat at the Village Level
2. Panchayat Samiti at the Block Level
3. Zilla Parishad at the District Level (Goel, 2009).'



Direct elections at the village level and indirect elections to committees and zilla parishads were proposed by the team. According to the committee, "a Panchayat Samiti would be formed at the block level, which would be indirectly elected by the village panchayats." The municipalities and cooperative institutions in the block would also be represented. Specific duties and income items were to be given to the committee. The Zilla Parishad, chairpersons of Panchayat Samitis, members of the State Legislature, Parliament, and all district level development department personnel were to be included as members. The Gram Panchayat was elected by adult suffrage, consisting of two women and one member each from the Scheduled Castes (SC) and the Scheduled Tribes (ST). The Panchayat was to operate as the Panchayat Samiti's agent for specified income items, such as land revenue sharing, and for certain necessary activities, such as executing programmes (Maddick, 2018). As a result, the plan called for a three-tier decentralisation structure, including Gram Panchayats, Panchayat Samitis, and Zilla Parishads. On January 12, 1958, the National Development Council accepted the committee's suggested strategy. It was also determined at the national level that the new system's wider patterns and fundamental features should be identical across the country, but not rigidly so. The real transfer of power to the people was more significant than the specifics of the pattern used. Several significant figures in the country praised the plan's execution. Much to the delight of Jai Prakash Narayan, the foundations of participatory democracy in the shape of Panchayati Raj had been

laid in our country. "The people of India would rule themselves through their representatives in institutions from the Panchayat to the Parliament in Panchayati Raj, and so democracy would go from the Lok Sabha to the Gram Sabha," SK Dey added (Dey, 1961). Nehru characterised Panchayats as the "Basis of democracy" in India in this sense. He showed his trust in the ability of the people to manage their problems in the greatest way possible when he spoke at the launch of Panchayati Raj in Rajasthan on October 2, 1959. After Balwant Rai Mehta's report, Panchayat Raj system was first adopted by the state of Rajasthan in Nagaur district on 2 Oct 1959 but first started by Andhra Pradesh. During the 1950s and 60s, other state governments adopted this system as laws were passed to establish panchayats in various states. Maharashtra was the ninth state.

This point was further strengthened by the Central Council for Local Autonomy by proposing that the development of this true transfer of authority to the people could be entrusted to the state governments. Therefore, state governments have developed their pattern of democratic decentralization. Almost all state governments accepted Balwant Rai Mehta's famous proposal for democratic decentralization. Following the change of government at the national level. In 1977, the Ashok Mehta Commission was established to review the Panchayati Raj system. The main recommendation of the Ashoka Mehta Commission was a two-tiered Panchayati Raj system. According to this recommendation, a two-tier structure at the district and Mandal levels are emphasised in the study. He prioritised Mandal Panchayats (which serve a population of 15,000 to 20,000 people) as the development hub. It was intended to be a low-level organisation. In addition, the group has proposed a draught constitutional status for the panchayat. The committee's recommendations were not implemented by the Central Government in 1980 due to a reorganisation in the ruling Congress Party led by Mrs. Indira Gandhi at the time. West Bengal, Karnataka, and Andhra Pradesh, on the other hand, embraced some of these proposals. However, the majority of the suggestions were not carried out. The ML Dantwala Committee (1978) looked at district planning. Therefore, in 1979 the Prime Minister's Conference rejected his two-tier system idea in favour of the continuation of the three-tier system (Aslam, 2007, pp.27).

The appointment of the Ashoka Mehta Commission in 1977 marked a turning point in the concept and practice of the Panchayati Raj institution, the second generation being spearheaded by the Government of West Bengal in his 1978 establishment. It can be said that it started with new life was breathed into the panchayat based on the recommendations of the Ashoka Mehta Commission. Given the decline of the Panchayati Raj institutions from 1969 to 1977 observed by the Ashoka Mehta Commission (Laxmikant, 2004). Soon after Rajiv Gandhi was appointed prime minister in 1985, two committees were established, which marked a significant improvement in this inconsistent and usually unpleasant situation. Under GVK Rao, the first was created to examine the policies governing rural development and poverty reduction. It suggested reviving Zilla Parishads and appointing a District Development Commissioner as the organization's chief executive. The establishment of efficient village-level committees and the reorganisation of Panchayati Raj Institutions were suggested by the second committee, which was led by HM Singhvi. Following the release of this study, the Sarkaria Commission on Centre-State Relations and a Parliamentary Consultative Committee both advised that Panchayati Raj Institutions be given a considerable

boost (). A special meeting of the All-India Congress Committee was called to discuss the issue following meetings with Collectors, District Magistrates, and members of existing Panchayats. This undoubtedly included the political ramifications of an administrative decentralisation initiative, but with Rajiv's government's support by this point in the polls dropping, there was certainly nothing to lose by it. Thus, the 64th proposed constitutional change bill was finally created and presented to Parliament in May 1989. A three-tier system of Panchayats at the village, intermediate, and district levels, each of which would be selected by direct election and have a fixed term of no more than five years, was planned to be made legally binding upon all states. The Lok Sabha first approved the measure, but the Rajya Sabha rejected it, prompting the Congress to seek an election. After being submitted a second time in 1991 (74th Amendment Bill), the law was ultimately passed. It was approved by the Lok Sabha on December 22–23, 1992, and received presidential assent as the 73rd Amendment to the Constitution in April 1993 after being ratified by half the states (Vali, 2012). In some situations, the States adopted drastic steps when the 73rd Amendment was enacted into law, which gave Panchayats enormous authority and responsibility. With legislation established in 1994 and elections held in 1995, Rajasthan was once again among the first to respond. 35 Some states, most notably Andhra Pradesh, adopted legislation earlier than others, albeit not always on favourable terms, to extend Panchayati raj to scheduled areas as well. After protests by S.T Communities, the AP Panchayati Act was actually overturned by the Andhra Pradesh High Court. Therefore, in 1996, the Lok Sabha approved a bill that would have expanded the projected Panchayati system of the 73rd Amendment to include all Schedule Tribes. According to the Act, "Andhra Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh, Bihar, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat, Rajasthan, and Orissa state governments with scheduled areas must transfer control of important areas to elected Panchayats in tribal areas, at least half of which must be Scheduled Tribes." Every village was required to have a Gram Sabha, which had the authority to approve plans and programmes for social and economic development in addition to having the statutory duties of maintaining local traditions, customs, and resources. The right to consult the Gram Sabhas in questions of land acquisition and the use of mineral resources was established. In accordance with section 4(m) of the Act, "state governments were also required to transfer to Gram Sabhas authority over prohibition, ownership of minor forest products, the ability to prevent land alienation, the management of village markets, the ability to exercise control over moneylending, social services, local plans, and development resources. "The Extension Act specifically recommended that the Gram Sabha's powers be safeguarded so that panchayats and state institutions at a higher level could not overrule them and assume their responsibilities, and that their devolution of responsibilities should be in line with the 6th schedule of the constitution. In other words, that they should have legislative, administrative, and judicial powers The 1996 Extension act and the 73rd constitutional amendment together proposed a significant upgrade of the Panchayats legal standing, which state level administrations are only now starting to come to terms with (Bates: 2005)

Conclusion

Panchayati Raj is a decentralized system of governance in India that empowers local self-government at the grassroots level. It was introduced under the Constitution of India in 1993, following the 73rd Amendment Act, which added Part IX to the Constitution. This Act aimed to strengthen democracy at the village level and ensure effective participation of people in decision-making processes. Historically, the concept of decentralized governance existed in ancient times, where village assemblies or councils played a crucial role in local administration. However, this system went through various changes during the British colonial rule, which centralized power in the hands of the British authorities. The Panchayati Raj system was reintroduced in modern India as part of the efforts to bring governance closer to the people, promote participatory democracy, and address local issues effectively. Its main objective is to provide political representation and functional autonomy to rural areas. Under the Panchayati Raj system, local self-government institutions are established at different levels, namely the village Panchayat, Panchayat Samiti and district levels. The village Panchayats are the most basic units of administration and consist of elected representatives called Panchayat members. These representatives are elected by the people through periodic Panchayat elections. The Panchayati Raj system encompasses various functions, including rural development, public health, education, water supply, sanitation, agriculture, and social welfare. It also promotes the participation of traditionally marginalized sections of society, such as Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, and women, in the decision-making process. Additionally, the Panchayati Raj institutions are given financial powers to mobilize resources and implement development programs at the local level. Financial devolution and accountability mechanisms are established to ensure effective utilization of funds and prevent corruption. However, the implementation of the Panchayati Raj system varies across states in India due to factors such as differences in political will, capacity, and resource availability. Some states have effectively empowered local governance, while others face challenges in devolving power and resources to the grassroots level. Overall, the Panchayati Raj system has played a significant role in promoting democratic governance, empowering local communities, and addressing rural development issues in India. However, continuous efforts are needed to strengthen the system, enhance citizen participation, and address the challenges faced in its implementation.

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