

Role Of Panchayati Raj System In Transforming Rural India

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ABSTRACT:

The Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) got constitutional status in 1992. These institutions have served as chief institution of providing local self governance by taking crucial role in implementing major plans and programs of the government. PRIs have been playing vital role in creating people's involvement for successful implementing of various mega schemes of the central government as well as the state government. It can be asserted that the earlier conventional political and economic environment and structure of the villages have been transformed into an advanced and more progressive structure by strengthening and decentralizing powers to the panchayats in India. The 73rd amendment Act of 1992 is a breakthrough in the evolution of grass root democratic institutions in India. It brings active participatory democracy in the place of representative democracy. The Panchayati raj system brings extensive transformation in empowering rural people through facilitating active participation in policy formulation and implementation and other functions relating to the nation building process. It ensures holistic development of the rural India. Panchayats provide governance to rural people for ensuring safeguard of their own socio-political and economic interests. It represents both collective will and collective wisdom of the entire rural community. The father of the nation Mahatma Gandhi considered panchayats as the foundation of India's political system where decentralized form of governance structure is established at grass root level. This paper aims to uphold the understanding and representation of the changes brought about by the Panchayats in rural India with the use of the historical, analytical and descriptive methods and secondary sources of data. This paper traces the role of the panchayats in empowering India's rural societies through successful implementation of welfare schemes and projects.

KEYWORDS: Panchayat, rural development, participatory democracy, empowerment, local self-governance

OBJECTIVE:

The objective of the study is to make a discussion and review on the role and functions performed by the Panchayati Raj Institutions for accelerating transformation in rural areas of

India. It will also trace understanding by putting emphasis on the significance of the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act 1992.

METHODOLOGY:

This paper is prepared with the use of both the historical and the descriptive analytical methods. The historical method helps in discussing the historical background relating to the study. The descriptive analytical method is used to critically discuss the changes brought about by the Panchayati raj system in broad socio-economic and political aspects in rural societies of India. In this study, the required information and data are collected from the secondary sources of data like books, articles, magazines, journals, newspapers and websites etc.

INTRODUCTION:

In India, the Panchayati Raj system has been playing crucial role in serving and prioritising people's interests and needs in rural societies since the ancient times. In ancient India, rural societies experienced Panchayat as a council of five persons who used to have executive and judiciary powers for the settlement of disputes among the villagers. The Panchayat as the initial rural political and administrative institution used to reflect collective representation and collective wisdom of the entire rural community. The concept 'Gram Swaraj' as village self-governance was the vision of Mahatma Gandhi. Gandhi profoundly advocated the empowerment of Panchayats through decentralization of power for achieving all round development of rural areas in India. Through empowering panchayati raj institutions, the villages become maker and decider of their own fate and goals. The Panchayati raj system appears to as the chief local self-governance and administration in rural areas of India. For the first time, the panchayati raj system was introduced in Nagpur district of Rajasthan in 1959 but it was first made operational by the state of Andhra Pradesh. Interestingly, during the 1950s and 60s, some other state governments embedded this system through formulating laws. Under the article 40 of the Indian Constitution, the state can take measures to organize village panchayats and entrust powers and authority to them and empower them to function as unit of self-government in rural areas. Prior to India's independence, it was the state of Bihar which adopted the panchayati raj system in 1947, which was a similar system of local self-government introduced by Lord Ripon in the British rule. Panchayats have been the backbone in rural India since the long time. Panchayati raj is a system of governance in which Gram Panchayats are the primary units of administration. Panchayati raj institutions (PRIs) play important role in implementing various schemes and programs and these institutions represent the core of decentralized development of planning and its implementation. Panchayats act in materializing the Gandhian dream of village self-governance (Gram Swaraj) as an effective tool for development that ensures the impetus for nation-building. Under the spirit of the 73rd constitutional amendment and with the implementation of state acts, the panchayati raj institutions have started functioning in a clear cut way for ensuring rural development. Government of India and different state governments are now profoundly taking the advantage of the decentralization for successful implementation of welfare schemes and poverty eradication programs.

DISCUSSION:

Development and operational of Panchayat Raj institution-

Panchayats are ancient Indian autonomous institutions. Existence of panchayats is found in ancient Indian religious texts “Rigveda” in the form of ‘Sabhas’ and ‘Samitis’. Literally panchayat implies assembly of five (Panch) wise and respected elders chosen by the villagers. Panchayati Raj is a system which provides a system of self- government at the village level. The tradition and the culture of rural India are deeply influenced by the philosophy of Panchayat Raj. It is the grass root unit of self-government which facilitates local self-governance to the rural people. Panchayat is considered as the pioneer institution of socio-economic transformation in rural India. Successful and effective working and operation of this crucial grass root unit depend on the active involvement and participation of villagers irrespective of caste, gender, sex, religion etc.

Objective of Panchayat Raj Institution:

- To ensure advancement of economically weaker sections and disadvantaged groups of the rural society.
- To grow cooperative self-help in the rural community.
- Development of cooperative units in rural society.
- Utilization of local resources and Man power.
- Prioritising rural economy and Agricultural production.
- Protection and promotion of rural small industries.
- Encouraging the involvement of voluntary organisations in rural development and progress.
- Empowering rural people in executing and implementing plans and projects for serving their own interests.

Significance of 73rd Amendment Act 1992:

It added a new part –IX to the constitution of India. Under this 73rd Amendment Act in 1992, the Article 243G of the constitution empowers the Gram panchayat (GPs) by decentralisation of powers and authority from the state government delivering of powers regarding all 29 subjects listed in the Eleventh schedule for local planning and implementation of projects and schemes for economic advancement and development and social justice.

Key role of Panchayati Raj institutions in implementation of Mega social sector schemes for rural development:

PRIs have key role in implantation of Mega rural development programs as follows-

Indira Awas Yojana (IAY) 1985-86:

The scheme IAY was started in 1985-86 during the ninth plan. It aims to provide housing for all and it provided construction of 13 lakh dwelling units in rural areas. Panchayat Raj institutions have the key role in selecting and identifying right beneficiaries under the IAY. Selection of beneficiaries is finalised by Gram Sabha and the selection of beneficiaries done on the basis of BPL list, in pursuance of seniority in the list.

MGNRIGA:

PRIs play important role in implementations of MGNRIGA in rural India. PRIs have been playing crucial role in implementing Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNRIGA) since its beginning in 2006. MGNRIGA is one of the largest employment generating scheme which facilitates alternative employment to the people in rural areas through guaranteeing 100 days of employment to each rural household. The scheme has 261 permissible works out of which around 164 types of works are concerned with Agriculture field and other activities like water conservation, construction of embankment etc. The process of decentralization is strengthened by PRIs significant role in planning, executing and implementing several activities under the MGNREGA. In the wake of the pandemic covid19, the number of permissible works under MGNRIGA had been increased up to 262 by adding unskilled wage component of 230 days for construction of community sanitary complex in connection with the Swachh Bharat Mission (Gram). The Gram Sabha recommends the works and at least 50% of works must be executed by PRIs. PRIs are responsible for planning implementation and monitoring of the works. For the year 2020-21, Rs 61.500 crore has been initially allocated. On the other hand, for the purpose of generating additional employment opportunities under The Aatma Nirbhar Bharat Abhiyan for dealing with the situation risen by covid19 pandemic, the government has additionally allocated Rs. 40000 crore to MGNREGA. This allocation shows mammoth responsibility of PRIs in execution and implementation of Mega welfare schemes.

Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana (PMGSY-2000):

This scheme is fully sponsored by the central government of India. This was launched on the 25th December 2000. The main objective of PMGSY is to ensure connectivity to all unconnected habitation in rural areas having a population of more than 500 persons.

National Social Assistance Programme (MSAP-1995):

This scheme is started by the central government for providing social assistance benefit to poor households in the case of old age, death of primary wage earner and maternity. The main elements of NSAP are National old age pension scheme (NOAPS), National family Benefit scheme (NFBS) and National Maternity benefit Scheme (PNMBS).

Jal Jeevan Mission (JJM):

PRI's role in effective implementation of Jal Jeevan Mission is considered as crucial. Panchayats put emphasis in implementation of Jal Jeevan Mission, a mega program launched by the Prime Minister Shri Norendra Modi in 2019. The Jal Jeevan Mission (JJM) aims to provide all rural households with a tap water supply in adequate quantity and of prescribed quality by 2024. It aims to provide functional household tap connection to every rural household of the country by the year 2024. During the fiscal year (2019-2020), the central government released Rs. 8,050 crore to the states for implementation of JJM. Under the spirit of the 73rd amendment, there is seen active involvement of local village and Gram Panchayats in effective planning, implementation, management and operation of the Jal Jeevan Mission for ensuring sustaining and durable water supply system at villages. Panchayats are working in

ensuring availability of pure quality of drinking water supply to the people of rural areas. In every Gram Panchayat, The sub-committee, Village water & sanitation Committee has been set up for effective planning and implementation of Jal Jeevan Mission at villages.

These are certain important programs and schemes made effective implementation and execution by the PRIs in rural India.

Significance of 73rd Amendment Act 1992:

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Certain provisions of this amendment are binding the states and others are left to be enacted by the respective state legislatures at their consideration.

Some important provisions of the 73rd amendment can be explained as follows:

1. Formation of a three -tier Panchayati Raj structure at the District (zila), block and village levels.
2. Direct election to be held for filling up most of these posts at three levels.
3. Minimum age for contesting election in PRIs is 21 years.
4. The post of chairman in District and Block levels should be filled by in district election.
5. Reservation of seats for scheduled castes and tribes in proportion to their population and for women in panchayats up to one- third seats.
6. Provisions of setting up state election commission in each state to conduct elections of PRIs.
7. The tenure of PRIs is five years. If dissolved earlier, fresh elections to be held within six months.
8. Provision of a state Finance commission in each state every five years.

Composition of panchayats:

Setting up of PRIs was done as three-tier structure based on direct election at all the three-tiers, Gram panchayat, Panchayat Samiti (intermediate) and Zila Parishad (district). There is exception from composition of the intermediate tier to the small states having less than 20 lakh population. The state legislatures were expected to empower panchayats with powers and authority necessary for Panchayats to be major institutions as self–government at the grass roots level. The functions of PRIs include preparing plans for economic development and social justice with regard to 29 important matters cited in XI schedule such as agriculture, primary and secondary education, health and sanitation, drinking water, rural housing, the welfare of weaker sections and social forestry etc.

Three –tier structure of Panchayati Raj Institution:

Gram Panchayat: Gram Panchayat obligatorily performs certain civic functions with regard to sanitation cleaning of public roads, minor irrigation, public toilets, primary health care, vaccination, the supply of drinking water, constructing public wells, rural electrification, social health, primary and adult education etc. Panchayats are also expected to perform functions like preparation of annual development plan of panchayat area, relief in natural calamities and removal of encroachment from public lands and implementation and monitoring of poverty education programs etc.

Panchayat samiti: Panchayat Samiti is the second or intermediary tier of the panchayati raj. Panchayat Samiti works as link between Gram Panchayat and Zila parishad. The strength of a panchayat Samiti depends on the population of the Samiti area. Some members of the panchayat samiti are directly elected. Sarpanchs of gram panchayats are ex-officio members of the panchayat samiti. Panchayat samities are the main source of developmental works. Panchayat samities perform some functions like agriculture, social and farm forestry, technical and vocational education etc.

Zila Parishad: The uppermost tier of PRIs is Zila parishad. Zila parishad has some directly elected members based on population. Chairpersons of panchayat samitis are ex-officio members of Zila parishad. Members of parliament legislative assemblies and councils residing in the districts are also nominated members of Zila parishads. It prepares district plans and consolidates samities plan into district plans for submission to the state government. Zila parishad monitors and supervises developmental activities in the entire district.

The 73rd constitutional amendment has brought substantial progress in implementing the key aspects of the legislation empowering panchayats such as-

All the states and union territories have passed conformity acts.

1. State election commission have been set up and regular elections have been conducted under their supervision in all states.
2. State Finance commission have been formed in all states and their recommendations obtained.
3. The improvement of infrastructure and governance in panchayats has increased significantly all over the country.

FUNDS, FUNCTIONS AND FUNCTIONARIES OF PANCHAYATI RAJ INSTITUTIONS:

The devolution of power that is fund, function and functionaries considered as the three core components of PRIs. In 2015-16, a devolution report released by the ministry of panchayati raj, disclosed that devolution has two major aspects that is the operational system which includes funds, functions and functionaries and another aspect is that the support system which deals with capacity building of PRIs, operationalising constitutional apparatus and providing system of transparency and accountability. Some states like Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Maharastra and Karnataka have shown better performance in comparison to other states in the country.

Rising financial powers of PRIs-

The financial devolution to PRIs started with the Tenth Finance Commission (1995-2000), that an amount of Rs 3576 crore was allocated to the states and it recommended Rs 100 per capita grants to the rural population as per the 1971 census to PRIs. The Eleventh Finance Commission (2000-2005) granted an amount of Rs.8, 000 crore to the panchayats. The united grant was allocated for maintenance of accounts and audit followed by the development of a financial database. The remaining amount was to utilize for core services like primary education, healthcare, drinking water, street lightening and sanitation in rural areas. The twelfth finance commission (2005-2010) recommended Rs. 20,000 crore grants for the PRIs and an amount of Rs. 18,926 crore was allocated to the PRIs in 27 states. The Thirteen finance commission (2010-15) had released an amount of Rs 58,256 crore and the fourteen finance commission has recommended a grant of Rs. 60,750 crore for Rural local bodies (RLBs) in 28 states. It has been the highest annual finance commission allocation for the RLBs.

However, the government of India has been taking several initiatives like giving incentives to the states which have provided devolution of power like finance, funds and functionaries in large scale to the PRIs. The government has provided financial and technical assistance for capacity building to PRIs that PRIs can perform the devolved functions effectively and strengthen budgeting system, accounting and auditing for ensuring transparency, accountability and efficiency in the functioning of PRIs. The Prime Minister shri Norendra Modi had launched a unified e-gram swaraj portal and mobile application along with the Swamitya Scheme on the 24th April, the National Panchayati Raj Day, 2020. The E-Gram Swaraj portal helps in preparing and executing development plans of the Gram Panchayat. The portal also ensures monitoring and accountability. The portal is a major initiative towards digitalization of gram panchayat level functioning. As a pilot study, the Swamitva Scheme is launched in six states, which helps in mapping rural inhabited lands by using drones and advanced survey methods. This will help in providing streamlined planning, revenue collection and clarity over property rights in rural areas. The Government under the leadership of Shri Norendra Modi, has put emphasis on providing self-sufficiency to villages and making Gram Panchayats stronger. Since 1992, Panchayati Raj Institutions have been playing a critical role in the process of progress and development of rural India with the increasing dependence of the government on PRIs for successful implementation of Mega Development programmes and projects, PRIs have ensured their position in the rural governance system.

CONCLUSION:

Panchayats are India's oldest autonomous democratic structure. Ancient Indian religious text like 'Rigveda' upholds the description of Panchayat in the form of 'Sabha' and 'Samities'. Since, the recognition of constitutional status to PRIs in 1992, the PRIs have been playing pivotal and streamlined role in the process of development and progress in rural India. Panchayati Raj System has been an integral part of tradition and culture of rural India. Panchayati Raj Institutions provided self-governance to the people living in villages of India. It provides realization of political powers and rights recognised by the Indian constitution to the people of rural areas through constitution of self-government at grassroots level. Panchayati raj system has been considered as the vehicle of socio-economic transformation in rural India. The Active involvement and participation of citizens regardless of gender, sex, caste, religion etc. can intensify the effective and successful functioning and operationalizing the panchayati raj institutions as a local autonomous government at village level. The Role of Panchayats in

gearing up rural development is vital. The growing dependence of the government on the PRIs for effective implementation of Mega programmes and proper utilization of local resources have been garnering the importance and vitality of panchayats in rural India. The implication of panchayats in materialisation of rural development for ensuring brightness to all aspects of rural people and societies draws immense attention from the process of policy making. The Rashtriya Gram Swaraj Abhiyan which is being implemented from 2018-19 to 2021-22 for developing governance capabilities of PRs. It puts emphasis on achieving sustainable development goals in convergence with the Mission Antodaya through strengthening panchayati raj institutions in the 117 aspirational districts.

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