

# Evolution of Panchayati Raj Institution in India

## Abstract

India is regarded as a land of villages. So, the importance of Panchayati Raj is self-evident. Panchayati Raj is generally a three-tier structure of local self-government at the village, block and district level. A Panchayat consist of five or more public representatives. This council of five representatives is fully responsible for administration and development of a village. To perform these functions. Panchayats have been given certain sources of revenue. The state government has hte power to delimit and alter its jurisdiction. Some remedial measures have been taken to remove some demerits of Panchayati Raj. With this,a bright future of Panchayati Raj has been ensured in India.

**Keywords:** Panchayats, Rigveda, grassroots, autonomous body, interference, Lord Rippon's, Dyarchy, viable, PV Narashima Rao's, Constitutional Status.

## Introduction

India is rightly regarded as "The Land of Villages". Village communities have been in existence in India for over centuries and Panchayats have been part of these communities since then. During the time of the *Rigveda*, evidence suggests that self-governing village bodies called *Sabhas* existed.<sup>1</sup> The passage of time saw these bodies evolve into Panchayats. Panchayats were functional instructions of grassroots governance in almost every village the village panchayat or elected council had large powers, both executive and judicial.

In ancient times every Indian village had a village Panchayat that used to function as an autonomous body. They were free from state interference. However, during the early British period, the village Panchayat lost their vitality and significance. The village disputes began to be brought before the city court for during for hearing and decision. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century some attempts were made to organize them in Bombay and Madras presidencies but the then, district authorities did not encourage them. It was during Lord Rippon's time that the local self-government got a new impetus. However, the successors of Lord Rippon threw cold water upon his scheme.

When Dyarchy was introduced in provinces under Government of India 1919 and local self-government was made a transferred subject, the village Panchayat Acts were passed in a number of Indian provinces and a new era of establishment and functioning of village Panchayats began. But then, due to paucity of funds the village Pnchayats could not come in their full form.

After the Government of India Act, 1935 the village Panchayats. again got a new momentum. With the beginning of the Second World War, responsible governments resigned. As a result the village Panchayats again got a setback. After the war was over and elections for the Provincial Legislative Assemblies took place in 1946 and responsible governments took charge a new era of Village Panchayat Started.<sup>2</sup>

India after Independence in 1947, a number of provinces enacted new village Panchayat Acts that tried to develop village Panchayats.

## Evolution of PRI after Independence

The PRI was introduced in India for strengthening grassroots democracy by democratic decentralization. It was left that most of the programmes for the development of rural community could show better results if local people's institutions like panchayats were fully involved in the planning and implementation of development programmes PRI became a viable instrument to empower the people at the grassroots level. There are various factors involved in the development of PRI in its present form. There are mention following.



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Indian Constitution contained the provision for PRI. Article 40 of the constitution of India which enshrines the D.P. of S.P. lays down that 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 self-govt. By the 73<sup>th</sup> constitutional amendment act 1992 now gives PRI a constitutions status.<sup>3</sup>

The First Five Year plan observed that the panchayats would be able to perform their civic functions satisfactory only if there are associated with an active process of development, in which the village panchayat is itself given an efficient part. The subsequent plans also reflected the same broad philosophy behind in India.

In 1952, Government of India launched the Community Development Programmes for improving the socio-economic conditions of the villages. The objectives of the, this programmes were, to increase the agriculture production in the country, improve the communication system and promote education in villages, secondly, to generate a process of integrated social, economic and cultural change with the ultimate aim of transforming social and economic life in villages. And third, to ensure that the ultimate responsibility for rural initiative remained with the people. the people's participation in the planning and the execution of the programmes was considered a necessary aspect of community development programmes.<sup>4</sup>

#### **Objectives of the Study**

1. PRI has improved the status of Women.
2. PRI has promoted grassroot democracy at the village level.
3. To improve the condition of villagers and to make the self-sufficient.
4. PRI has played a significant role for the alleviation of poverty at the village level.

#### **Evolution of Panchayati Raj Institution in India**

Its formal organisation and structure was firstly recommended by Balwant Rai G Mehta committee, 1957 (Committee to examine the Community Development Programme, 1952). The Committee submit, in its report in November recommended the establishment of the scheme of 'democratic decentralisation', which ultimately came to be know as Panchayati Raj. It recommended for a three tier system at village, block and district level and it also recommended for direct election of village level panchayat Rajasthan was the first state to establish Panchayati Raj at it started from Nagaur district on October 2, 1959.<sup>5</sup> After this, Ashok Mehta Committee on Panchayati Raj was appointed in December 1977 and in August 1978 submitted its report with various recommendation to revive and strengthen the declining Panchayati Raj System in the country. Its major recommendation were two tier system of panchayats, regular social audit, representation of political parties at all level of panchayat elections, provisions for regular election, reservation to SCs/STs in panchayats and minister for panchayati raj in state council of ministers.<sup>6</sup>

Further Dantwala Committee Report on Block-Level Planning (1978) and the Hanumantha

Rao Committee Report on District Planning (1984). Both the committees have suggested that the basic decentralized planning function should be done at the district level. the Hanumantha Rao Committee advocated separate district planning bodies under either the District Collector or minister. In both the models, the Collector should play a significant role in the decentralised planning though the Committee stated that Panchayati Raj institutions would also be associated with this process of (decentralised planning). The committee recommended that the Collector should be the coordinator, at the district level, of all development and planning activities.<sup>7</sup>

Another Committee G V K Rao appointed by Planning Commission in 1985. The Committee to review the existing Administrative Arrangements for Rural Development and Poverty Alleviation Programmes. The Committee came to conclusion that the developmental process was gradullay bureaucratized and divorced from the Panchayati Raj. The phenomena of Bureaucratization of development administration as against the democratisation weakened the Panchayati Raj institutions resulting in what is aptly called as 'grass without roots'. It's main focus were "the district is the proper unit for planning and development and the Zila Parishad should become the principal body for management of all development programmes which can be handled at that level", A post of District Development Commissioner should be created, elections to the Panchayati Raj institutions should be held regularly.<sup>8</sup>

In 1986, Rajiv Gandhi government appointed a committee to prepare concept paper on 'Revitalisation of Panchayati Raj institutions for Democracy and Development'. Another Committee appointed by Centre Government known as P.K. Thungon Committee. Thungon to examine the political and administrative structure in the district for the purpose of district planning. It made certain recommendation that Panchayati Raj should be constitutionally recognized, a detailed list of subjects for Panchayati Raj should be prepared and incorporated in the Constitution, The district Collector should be the chief executive officer of the Zilla Parishad, the maximum period of super session of a body should be six months.

#### **A brief Journey of PRI as a Constitutional**

For the establishment of PRI Rajiv Gandhi Government introduced the 64<sup>th</sup> Constitutional Amendment Bill in the Lok Sabha in July 1989 to them more powerful and broad based. Although, the Lok Sabha passed the bill in August 1989, it was not approved by the Rajya Sabha. The bill was vehemently opposed by the Opposition on the ground that it sought to strengthen centralisation in the federal system. The V P Singh government also brought a bill, but fall of the government resulted in lapse of the bill. After this P V Narashima Rao's government introduced a bill for this purpose in Lok Sabha in September, 1991 and the bill finally emerged as the 73<sup>rd</sup> Constitutional Amendment Act, 1992 and came into force on 24<sup>th</sup> April, 1993.<sup>9</sup>

**Feature of the 73<sup>rd</sup> Amendment Act 1992**

This act has added a new Part-IX to the Constitution of India. This part is entitled as 'The Panchayats' and consists of provisions from Articles 243 to 243 O. In addition, the act has also added a new Eleventh Schedule to the Constitution. The schedule contains 29 functional items of the panchayats. It deals with Article 243-G.<sup>10</sup>

**It's main recommendation are following-**

1. The Panchayati Raj has been granted Constitutional Status.
2. 1/3 reservation of SCs/ST on the basis of their populations. Further not less than one-third of the total number of offices of chairpersons in the panchayats as each level shall be reserved for women.
3. The Act provides for the election of Panchayati Raj bodies for a period of 5 years. All election from respective territorial constituencies.
4. For the smooth conduct and supervision of elections, a State Election Commission has to be constitute in every State.
5. The Act also provides for the setting up of District planning Committee (DPC) in order to enhance bottom-up planning in every district.
6. As per the provisions of Act a Finance Commission would be constituted for each state which would take care of the financial position of Panchayati Raj institutions.
7. The Act provides for a Gram Sabha in each village exercising such powers and performing such functions at the villages level as the Legislature of a State may provide by law. The elections in respect of all the members to Panchayats at all levels will be direct and the elections in respect of the post of Chairman at the intermediate and district level will be indirect.
8. A uniform term of 5 years has been provided for the PRIs and in the event of supersession, elections to constitute the body should be completed before the expiry of six months from the date of dissolution.
9. The Act further grants the state legislatures the powers to authorize the Panchayats to levy, collect and appropriate suitable local taxes.
10. The Governor of a state shall, after every five years, constitute a Finance Commission to review the financial position of the panchayats.
11. The State Legislature may make provisions with respect to the maintenance of accounts by the panchayats and the auditing of such accounts.
12. The superintendence, direction and control of the preparation of electoral rolls and conduct of all elections to the panchayats shall be vested in the State Election Commission.
13. The president of India may direct that the provisions of this act shall apply to any union territory subject to such exceptions and modifications as he may specify. (The act does not apply to the Nagaland, Meghalaya and Mizoram and certain other areas. These are include, (a) the Scheduled Areas and the Tribal Areas in the states; (b) the Hill Area of Manipur for which a district council exists; and (c)

Darjeeling district of West Bengal for which Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council exists.

14. The Act bars the interference by courts in the electoral matters of panchayats.

**Problem Faced by Panchayats****Lack of Funds**

The PRI have no strength in terms of both autonomy and efficiency. They are depend on the government for financial. In general, Panchayats in our country receive funds in the following ways: Grants from the Union Government based on the recommendations of the Central Finance Commission as per Article 280 of the Constitution, Devolution from the State Government based on the recommendations of the State Finance Commission as per Article 243-I., Loans/grants from the State Government, Programme-specific allocation under Centrally Sponsored Schemes and Additional Central Assistance.

**Lack of Cordial Relation between officials and people**

Introduction of the Panchayati Raj aimed at securing effective participation of the people. But in reality this hardly happens since the key administrative and technical positions are manned by the government officials.

**Lack of Conceptual clarity**

There is lack of clarity in regard to the concept of Panchayati Raj itself and the objective for which it stands. Some would treat it just as an administrative agency while some others look upon it as an extension of democracy at the grass roots level, and a few others consider it a charter of rural local government.

**Administrative Problem**

In some States, the Gram Panchayats have been placed in a position of subordination. Hence, the Gram Panchayat Sarpaches have to spend extraordinary amount of time visiting Block Offices for funds and technical approval. These interactions with the Block Staff Office distort the role of Sarpaches as elected representatives.

**Status of the Gram Sabha**

Empowering the Gram Sabhas could have been a powerful weapon for transparency, accountability and for involvement of the marginalized sections. However, a number of the State acts have not spelt the powers of Gram Sabhas nor have any procedures been laid down for the functioning of these bodies or penalties for the officials. The Panchayati Raj scheme is defective in so far as the distribution of functions between the structures at different levels has not been made along scientific lines.

**Conclusion**

It continues to be the responsibility of Panchayati Raj institutions to construct an environment in the villages in which planning, formulation and implementation of various rural development programmes would promote greater participation of the people. The objective of Panchayati Raj should be to develop and administrative framework which would be decentralized and where devolution of power will be

enhanced leading to democratization of authority and responsibility. PRI should be made responsible for planning and development within their jurisdiction. All the three units, the village, the block and the district have to play a role in planning, keeping in view the local needs of the local people. Need based planning should be promoted. Adequate resources should be generated at the local level itself so that planners need not depend upon the resources from the higher bodies.

Our endeavour should be to reconstruct Indian polity with the help of Panchayati Raj Institutions at the local level. Effort should be made to decentralize power genuinely from the Union Government to the State Government and from the state government to the local government bodies.

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