

Role of Panchayati Raj in Social Development: A Analitical Study Present Scenario

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Abstract

In India, the Panchayati Raj generally refers to the local self-government of villages in rural India as opposed to urban and suburban municipalities, this system was introduced by a constitutional amendment in 1992. Sustainable developmental goals (SDG's) are new global level of goals, with targets and indicators that 193 member countries of United Nations in the world have mutually set and agreed upon. There are 17 goals on which the entire world is focusing at present to ensure sustainable development. For attaining these goals, local self-governance is used at the grassroots levels and in India the machinery is Panchayati raj Institutions. These institutions operate from central and state government level and include all the villages in it. These villages have panchayats and it is maintained by Gram Pradhans i.e. elected representatives, Secretary and other members of the gram panchayats. Though a lot is being done at grassroot level by these Gram Pradhans, under the mechanism of Panchayati raj institution and other administrative bodies, however it is not free from challenges. The present case study is a descriptive study which focuses attention to identify different challenges the elected representatives experience, in Panchayati raj institutions in India, which contribute directly for the sustainable development.

Keywords: Panchayati Raj, Sustainable Development, Rural Development.

Introduction

Panchayati Raj is an old concept in India and in a way it is the earliest concept of democracy in the history of civilization. The concept of five elected seniors in a village form a sort of self-government of the organization to settle down matters of dispute of the community has not been found in anywhere else in the world as recorded by Chinese Travelers in their diaries. Panchayat has been in existence in India since the dawn of civilization. While empires arise and fell, village Panchayati continued to survive giving continuity to Indian Village traditions. The Vedas, the Rigveda in particular reveal that ancient Hindus used to lead a cooperative life. Valmiki's Ramayana, the Mahabharata have also described existence of such institutions. The inspiration of Panchayati Raj is derived from the tradition of 'PanchParameshwara' where God speaks through the five and the official publications speak of village republic.

Jawaharlal Nehru in his "Discovery of India" pointed out that "the village Panchayat or elected council had large powers both executive and judicial and its members were treated with the greatest respect. By the King's order, lands were distributed by this Panchayat and which also collected taxes out of the produce and paid the Government's share on behalf of the village. Over and above these village councils, there was a larger Panchayat or council to supervise and interfere, if necessary".

Panchayats have been one of the basic features of the Indian society. As we know even Mahatma Gandhi advocated for panchayats and village republics. Since independence, we had multiple provisions of Panchayats in India from time to time finally reaching epitome with the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act of 1992.

Aims of the Study

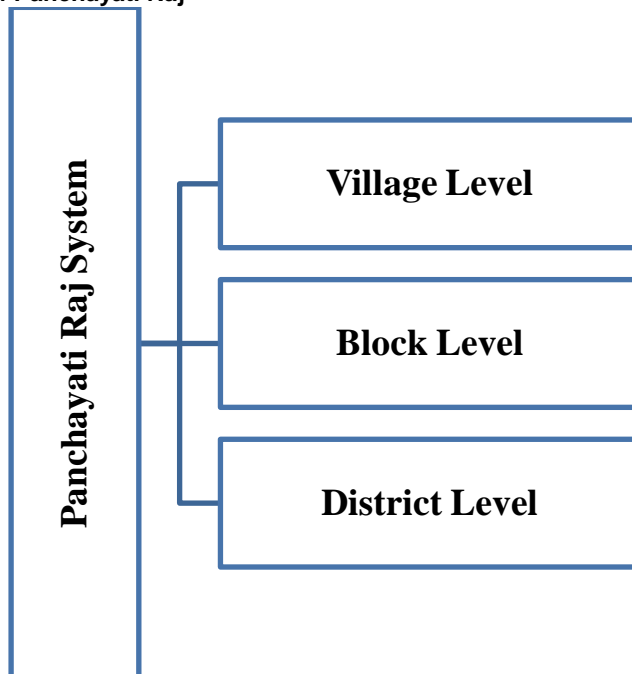
The main aim of the present study are:

1. To trace out the origin and evolution of Panchayati Raj Institutions in India;

2. To examine the organization, structure and functioning of Panchayati Raj Institutions in India
3. To study the important developmental activities taken up by the India

4. To point out the deficiencies, if any and to offer suggestions for the improvement of Panchayati Raj system in India.

Three Tier Structure of Panchayati Raj-



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

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

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

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.

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.

Salient Features of The Panchayati Raj System

1. To provide 3-tier system of Panchayati Raj for all States.

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

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.

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

Significance of Panchayati Raj System

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.

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 scheduled areas) Act 1996, extends Panchayats to the tribal areas of Andhra Pradesh, Chhatisgarh, 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.

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.

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.

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.

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 (PradhanMantri Gram SadakYojana) etc have made conspicuous difference in rural areas.

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.

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.

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 Panchayat 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.

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