



Panchayati Raj Institutions Development in Rajasthan



"India is poor because villages of India are poor. India will be rich if the villages of India are rich. Panchayats should be given greater powers, for we want the villagers to have a greater measure of swaraj (self government) in their own villages."

- Jawahar Lal Nehru



My idea of Gram 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 necessary.

- Mahatma Gandhi

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Mahatma Gandhi, the father of the nation, often emphasized that India lives in villages (at the time of independence, about 82.7 per cent population of India lived in villages) and unless the village life is revitalized, the nation as a whole cannot make progress.

These ideas and the Article 40 of the Constitution of India, which declared that 'the state shall take steps to organize Village Panchayats and to endow them with such powers and authority as may be necessary to enable them to function as the units of self-government,' paved the way for the introduction of Panchayati Raj—a scheme of 'democratic decentralization' in India.

In India, the system of panchayats has a long history. Its structure however varied from time to time. In village India, the concept of 'Panch Parmeswar' is very old and very prominent.

As we know, India is a caste-ridden society. Along with Gram Panchayats we also find Caste Panchayats in every caste to solve their social problems like marital discord and disputes. During the British period, an effort was made to revive the Village Panchayats but it could not make any success.

The present Panchayati Raj system is the result of the failure of the Community Development Projects (CDPs)—a kernel programme of rural development launched in 1952 as an arm of five-year plans. The two successive plans had failed to not only produce desired results but also generate real enthusiasm among the people. It was felt that the scheme of CDP failed because of the lack of proper governance.

In the context of this crisis of governance (inefficiency, corruption, lack of accountability, mounting disillusionment of the citizens towards government institutions and officials), decentralization was widely accepted as a powerful means to instill confidence and revive trust of people in government programmes.

Democratic renewal through reorganizing the power structure would bring the government closer to people. It was seen as a means to deepen democracy, make governance accountable and responsive. Not only would it enhance the effectiveness of public policies and service delivery, but also give greater voice to citizens.

It was hoped that the experiment of the Panchayati Raj will be able to harness and develop the better characteristics of the average villagers in spite of their illiteracy and restricted range of experience. It was also expected that this system will bring new aspiration and fresh stimulus to national self-respect. In the present scheme of Panchayati Raj, the villagers have been held responsible for all-round improvement in the village life, including education, sanitation, medical relief—curative and preventive, lighting, housing, maternity and child welfare along with the administration of civil, criminal and revenue justice. It was thought that this system would be powerful means for self-preservation in the arena of social life. Good governance is considered as the control idea of Development. A system of structured governance empowers the government to deliver services to the citizen and to mobilize resource and revenue for the societal development. And it can only be achieved by participation of the different stakeholders of the development process. Because of its size and its relatively ambitious efforts to decentralize government, India provides an important context for understanding the ways in which decentralization can improve the performance and accountability of local government. Indeed, there is lot to be done towards improving village infrastructure and it should be done in a fairly participatory manner so that people's aspirations can also get their space.

In this study, different structural and functional aspects related with panchayats at grassroots level have been analysed. Development of villages depends heavily on Panchayati Raj Institutions and their effective functioning that is why five better considered states in terms of PRI functioning have been selected and a comparative analysis based on different parameters has been done. Findings show that panchayats are running inefficiently and there is total lack of people's participation. There is urgent need of removing the legislative and procedural problems that constrain the Gram Sabha, greater devolution of funds, functions and functionaries, putting in place mechanisms of audit and accountability and strengthening the participation of women for improving governance and functioning of panchayats.

Indeed, measures are needed whereby the poor can participate more effectively through PRIs and local informal groups and people's movements.

Although the Indian independence movement, under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi, had villages and their self-governing system at the center, when the Constitution of independent India was written they did not get a place in its main body; only a reference in the Directive Principles of state policy. Therefore the states did not take both the urban and rural local bodies seriously. As a result of campaigns by civil society organisations, intellectuals and progressive political leaders, the parliament passed on December 22 and 23, 1992 two amendments to the

Constitution - 73rd Constitution Amendment for rural local bodies (panchayats) and 74th Constitution for Amendment for urban local bodies (municipalities) making them 'institutions of self-government'. Within a year all the states passed their own acts in conformity to the amended constitutional provisions.

As a result of these constitutional steps taken by the union and state government, India has moved towards what has been described as 'multi-level federalism', and more significantly, it has widened the democratic base of the Indian polity. Before the amendments, the Indian democracy structure through elected representatives was restricted to the Indian polity. Before the amendments, the Indian democratic structure through elected representatives was restricted to the two houses of parliament, 25 state assemblies and two assemblies of union territories (Delhi and Pondicherry). And they had just 4,963 elected members.

Now there are nearly 600 district panchayats, about 6,000 block panchayats, at the intermediate level and 2,50,000 gram panchayats in rural India where 72.2 percent of India's population lives. Urban India, with 27.8 percent of India's population, has 96 city corporations, 1700 town municipalities and 1,900 Nagar panchayats.

The Constitution (73rd Amendment) Act, 1992 has added a new part IX consisting of 16 Articles and the Eleventh Schedule to the Constitution. The 73th Amendment envisages the Gram Sabha as the foundation of the Panchayat Raj System to perform functions and powers entrusted to it by the State Legislatures. The amendment provides for a three tier Panchayat Raj System at the village, intermediate and district levels. In 1993, the 73rd constitutional amendment, which brought in the panchayati raj system, ensured one-third reservation for women and seats proportionate to their population for the Scheduled Castes (SC) and Scheduled Tribes (ST). But the decision by BJP governments in Rajasthan to make education a prerequisite for those contesting the panchayat polls has effectively denied women, Dalits, Advises and minorities their basic right to political participation. The worst casualties are those at the intersectionality such as Devi and Sarifan. In December 2014, days before the announcement of the panchayat polls, the Vasundhara Raje government issued an ordinance amending the Rajasthan Panchayati Raj Act. It set minimum educational qualifications for those contesting the local elections: Class X for a member of the zila parishad or panchayat samiti and Class VIII for sarpanch of gram panchayats. Less than a year later, the Manohar Khattar government passed a similar amendment to the Data from the Rajasthan election commission shows that even after the panchayat poll in January 2015 and two by-elections thereafter, seven sarpanch posts in the state are vacant. Five of these are reserved for ST women and one for a woman in the general category. Due to lack of candidates who meet the education criteria, the number of sarpanch candidates who have been elected unopposed has more than doubled in the state as compared to the previous polls: 260 nirvirodh sarpanch now as against 97 in 2010. Panchayati Raj Act. Accordingly, general category candidates had to clear their Class X, women and SC candidates their class VIII and SC candidates for the post of panch their class V. In both states, candidates also had to have a functional toilet to be eligible to contest. Data from the Rajasthan election commission shows that even after the panchayat poll in January 2015 and two by-elections thereafter, seven sarpanch posts in the state are vacant. Five of these are reserved for ST women and one for a woman in the general category. Due to lack of candidates who meet the education criteria, the number of sarpanch candidates who have been elected unopposed has more than doubled in the state as compared to the previous polls: 260 nirvirodh sarpanch now as

against 97 in 2010. imposed further property-based disqualifying factors such as failure to clear arrears due to electricity providers or agricultural cooperative banks. When challenged in the courts, the constitutionality of the decisions were upheld by the Rajasthan High Court and, more recently in the case of Data from the Rajasthan election commission shows that even after the panchayat poll in January 2015 and two by-elections thereafter, seven sarpanch posts in the state are vacant. Five of these are reserved for ST women and one for a woman in the general category. Due to lack of candidates who meet the education criteria, the number of sarpanch candidates who have been elected unopposed has more than doubled in the state as compared to the previous polls: 260 nirvirodh sarpanch now as against 97 in 2010., by the Supreme Court. A division bench of the apex court observed that “it is only education which gives a human being the power to discriminate between right and wrong, good and bad.”

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Suggestions:-

1. Department should collect data which help in estimating the number of toilets needed in rural areas.
 2. It should further be estimated as to how much construction is possible in one year.
 3. The reviews of the number of constructed toilets and allotted amount shall be done more frequently.
 4. PPP model can be adopted for better utilization
 5. The development programmes shall be carried out throughout the year in a phased & planned manner.
 6. Involvement of local professionals or NGOs can be done to ensure better outputs.
- Thus, we can say that due to the negligence of system the rural areas remain under developed. The government in spite of providing huge amount of funds remains unsuccessful in fostering the growth of rural India. There is a need to keep a strict watch over the utilization of funds by Gram Panchayats.

At the end...

Thus, to conclude, it can be stated that the devolution of power to the people without requisite development of character, training and capacity had been found to be a curse in the functioning of democratic institutions in our country and there were apprehensions that this new step in democratic decentralization, designed to be blessing, would turn out to be a curse to the people in the villages. The success of the step more than anything else depended on the quality of elected representative—Panchas and Sarpanchas—of these institutions. No institutional change can bring about climatic change or strengthen the roots of democracy in this country, if it is divorced of the spirit behind it. In the absence of this basic change, which is a sine qua non to all other changes, we doubt, if institutional changes alone will take the country very far.

In the beginning, responsibility for the planned development of the country through CDP and cooperative institutions was imposed on the people who were expected to discharge them in PRIs who were mostly uneducated and untrained mass of people. But there is a great change now in this condition. Obviously, such a step, though basic and pregnant with great possibilities to

strengthen the roots of democracy, was fraught with grave risks, disappointments and failures in its traditional phase. Clearly, measures are needed whereby the poor can participate more effectively through PRIs and local informal groups and people's movements. Measures are required for addressing the difficulties of institutionalising the participation of the poor in PRI functioning.

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