



Major Mile Stone of Panchayat Raj System in India An Analysis.

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ABSTRACT

India as one of the largest and most vibrant democracies in the world enjoys a Vital place among the comity of countries. As a nation we have every reason to proud of the fact that despite tremendous socio Economic Challenges our democratic system has emerged from strength to strength over the last 69 years and rest of the world look upon India with administration for its democratic values proving the critics wrong, we have further consolidated our unity in diversity over the years. In fact, for the newly emerging nations India has become a role modes as a powerful and meaning for democracy. As we salute the founding fathers of our country for the tremendous wisdom and fore sight in laying down the guiding principles, we have equal responsibility to mark ahead in the right path of democracy based on inclusiveness. The emergence and evolution of panchayati Raj system in India has in fact paved the way for further strengthening our democratic roots. Needless to say, decentralization is the key to attain better Economic efficiency accountability and overall socio-Economic development with equitable distribution of income and wealth. After the 73rd amendment of Indian Constitution, two decades of Panchayati Raj system in India has brought about improvements in our democratic system at the grassroots level thirty three percent reservation for women, 52 percent in some states has empowered the women focus of India legitimate right in Exercising their legitimate right in participatory democracy.

KEYWORDS : Democracy, Inclusiveness, Accountability.

Introduction

The Panchayati Raj institutional up, especially mandated under 73rd amendment to the Constitution of india is most appropriate manifestation of a democracy envisioned as a system of good governance and inclusive development of the people, for the people and by the people. It is, in fact, a step towards empowering direct democracy as against a representative democratic system practiced under parliamentary and legislative systems of governance.

The vital characteristics of democratic management, viz. bootom up planning, participatory decision making, community led implementation of development programmes and welfare schemes involving all cross section of the society to achieve equitable and integrated growth can be effectively visualized under the empowered Panchayati Raj system mandated under 73rd constitutional amendment, if it is given due opportunity to evolve by the state governments. The 73rd amendment, while mandating Panchayati Raj to empower grass root democracy has left much to the discretion of the individual state governments to devolve this mandate upon Panchayati Raj. It is one of the reasons why the potential so obvious in these provisions is not sprouting into reality.

However, before taking a stock of these provisions which have a potential to transform the Panchayati Raj regime into grass roots empowered system of good governance let us take a brief review of the stages of the evolution of Panchayati Raj continuum in the country.

Legally mandated formal democratic institutional set up for Panchayat Raj in the country can be traced back, though in a limited format to the British Raj. **Bombay Local Bound Act 1884** providing for district and taluka level Local Boards heavily controlled by the bureaucracy was one of the early attempts towards the establishment of Local Self Government Institutions. It is **Bombay Local Boards Act 1923** which provided for directly elected president and vice President on the Local Boards providing for local body election, though the voting rights were too restrictive. As for Village Panchayats **Bombay village Panchayat Act 1920** for the first time mandated the formation for statutory Village Panchayat as a wholly elected Body, where again the voting rights were restricted to make adults. More liberal law, providing for voting rights to women was enacted in 1933. However, the formation of village Panchayat was not obligatory under this Act. The major subject entrusted to the Village Panchayat was Sanitation. It seems that sanitation was a priority issue even then as today as obtained through Swach Bharat Mission.

However, even before British raj initiatives, the traditional Village level socially and community oriented institutions having participatory/consultative decision making process were existing in different regions in the country. Caste Panchayats, Temple centric decision making bodies, khap Panchayats, where the leadership was to be chosen on the parameters of social status, stature, age, gender, financial prowess were prevalent. They were not truly democratic bodies but a consultative process was formally observed where the decisions were respected by the community under peer pressure to shun social stigma for a failure to adhere to the decisions. The principle of natural justice was hardly observed. Nevertheless, the threads of community involvements were noticeable.

It is only after the passage of Government of India Act 1935 conferring more powers, authority and responsibility upon the provincial legislative bodies that they took it to their heart to introduce truly Panchayati Raj Democratic set up in British ruled Indian territories. The Act of 1938 made district boards truly democratic institution of development in Bombay province while Village Panchayat Act 1939 conferred similar status upon village Panchayats, It is under this Act that the powers to levy house tax, appointment of secretary to gram panchayats, share in the land revenue collected from the jurisdiction of the Panchayat had been conferred upon them. Few other provinces and some princely states subsequently followed and extended similar democratic mandate as deemed expedient to the village Panchayats.

Objectives of the study:

1. To review the historical evolution of PRI in India.
2. To study the major achievements of panchayati Raj system in India.
3. To evaluate the Role of PRI in India.

Methodology:

The percent paper is based on secondary sources And The Study is based on descriptive analysis

After Independence:

After independence we do find a mention of village Panchayat under Article 40 of the Constitution in the chapter mentioning the directive principles of state policy. It only states that the state shall take steps to organize Village Panchayat and endow them with such powers and authority as may be them with such powers and authority as may be necessary to enable them to function as units of self government. It was left to the discretion of the states to exercise the choice to establish panchayat. Few states did take initiatives establishing and strengthening Village Panchayats. Community

Development Block policy of the Central Government also gave impetus to the Panchayat Raj. Under Bombay Village Panchayat Act 1958, the Panchayats in then Bombay state (Comprising of Gujarat Area & Maharashtra) were delegated the powers to collect land revenue and maintain land records. But such liberal views quite quickly found reversals when these power were withdrawn and entrusted back to the revenue department of the state government. After the recommendations of Mehta committee on panchayat Raj, Rajasthan was the first state to adopt them. However, Maharashtra adopted it with certain modification making district level Zilla Panchayat a most powerful institution, literally Rural Zilla Sarkar transferring state govt. staff of many development departments to Zilla Panchayat, particularly the grade C & D Categories. A & B grade Officers were sent on deputation to head district level Zilla Panchayat & Block level Panchayat Samitee departments. However, the powers, authority & responsibility delegated in 1962 onwards had been gradually taken back and by 1972, after the formation of District Planning and Development Council (DPDC) headed by one of the state ministers, reduced Zilla Panchayat president only to a member in DPDC. (The minister in charge of the district has a designation as a Guardian Minister) All the Members of Parliament and Members of State Legislature from the district were included in the DPDC. The development planning. Authority got transferred to state government. Through DPDC, diluting the role of Zilla Panchayat in development programmes. Add to this, the election of the Panchayats at all the three tiers were not held for 13 Years and after the orders of the Court, administrators were appointed superseding the Zilla Panchayat bodies.

SALIENT FEATURES OF PANCHAYATI RAJ SYSTEM

The 73rd Constitutional amendment was enacted to reform the Panchayati Raj system, in order to further strengthen democratic process in India. The amendment was meant to provide constitutional sanction to establish democracy at the grassroots level as it is at the state national level.

Its main features are as follows:-

- The **Gram Sabha** or village Assembly as a deliberative body to decentralize governance has been envisaged as the basic foundation of the Panchayati Raj system. The amendment empowered the **Gram Sabha** to conduct social audits besides its other functions.
- A uniform three-tier structure of Panchayats at village (Gram Panchayat, Intermediate or block (Panchayat Samiti) and district (Zilla Parishad) levels.
- All seats in Panchayat at each level are to be filled by elections.
- Not less than one third of the seats for membership and office of chairpersons of each tier should be reserved for women.
- Reservations for Schedule Caste and Schedule Tribes have to be provided at every level as per their population in the Panchayats.
- To promote bottom up planning, the district planning committee in each district has been provided constitutional status.

The state legislatures have been given powers to decide on the composition of **Gram Sabha** and Gram Panchayats. Therefore, powers, functions and composition of Gram Panchayats are determined by state governments in line with local needs.

Gram Sabha is the basic foundation of Panchayati Raj system. A village with not less than 1500 population forms **Gram Sabha** and every adult becomes a member of it. If the population is less than that such villages are grouped together to form a **Gram Sabha**. The functions of **Gram Sabha** changes from time to time as prescribed by respective states.

The basic difference between **Gram Sabha** and Gram Panchayat is that, while **Gram Sabha** constitutes each adult member of a village, Gram Panchayat is the executive members elected by the **Gram Sabha** to work for the village development.

Conclusion:

Constitution has put in place the institutional structure and system for the efficient operationalisation of grass roots democratic management and governance. In last 20 years Panchayats have come of age. They can do yeoman service to imbibe, inculcate and institutionalize the democratic local management in the country. Let the state governments believe in their strengths to bring about transformation in the lives of the masses and given them full opportunity to empower the grass root direct democracy in rural India. It will be an appropriate tribute to the Father of the Nation, Mahatma Gandhi, who dreamt of each village becoming a Republic, on his 150th birthday falling on 2nd October 2019.

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