



## THE ROLE OF STANDING COMMITTEES IN PANCHAYAT RAJ INSTITUTIONS IN INDIA: A STUDY

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### ABSTRACT

Man is evolving through ages. Various phases of development have given new avenues for the betterment of its own welfare. The term administration was more of a systematic way of running a system. This structured system is a modern system according to which a country and subordinate units are administered. The importance of local administration is always matter of concern for a country like India where predominance of rural areas holds their importance in administrative setup of the country. Before independence, the country had strong panchayat system where a village as a unit played its decisive role in solving all the problems rose in its limit. The striking feature was that village panchayat remained as an apex system whose decisions were final and binding. The solutions for problems never used to go out of the frame of a village. A team of elderly persons hail from a village or surrounding villages headed by one elder most people in whom the supreme power of taking decisions used to be kept.

**KEYWORDS** : Panchayth Raj, Standing Committee, Social Justice, Administrative etc

### Introduction

Man is evolving through ages. Various phases of development have given new avenues for the betterment of its own welfare, the way his thought process generated the realms of cultural development became a guiding force in carrying out the distinguished pockets of cultural diffusions.

The current phase of urbanization is the off-shoot of rural world that rural settlement system was set to be the more convenient way of living, man discovered for himself, this is the closest system of living to the nature with least violation of natural laws. Today the countryside is at its stake in surviving, though India holds its long history of rural culture, unable to sustain it. The reason behind its strong hold on rural India is because of the strong hold they held in rural administration. This unique system is put to test with upcoming trends of contemporary world.

### Origin of Panchayath raj

The word 'Panchayat' raj is derived from the word pancha or five meaning gram sanghas or rural communities, this is said to be found in shanti parva of the Mahabharata. This reference dates back to the times of kutilya in his arthashastra. In those days a village used to be administered by an adhyakshya or head man along with people of various professions who could support him. At this reference holds no formal procedures in those days but only a way of adapted system in which they bounded themselves in it. In those days in administering a village was done through conducting sabha or gram sabha which held all the powers of execution and judicial. In this system various people were given various posts to control the system like anikitsaka (veteran doctor) samkhyaka (accountant) jamghkarmika (village courier) etc.

### Review of literature

#### 1. Singh. D.R. (1990):

D. R. Singh in his book 'Panchayat raj rural organization' explained the Panchayat raj system of Uttarpradesh and the political, social, economic background of the Panchayat raj system is discussed in detail. He also brought in the age, family background, caste politics and also the participation of the members in their constitution. While explaining the above he detailed about the leadership in the constancies.

#### 2. Jha. S.N. and Mathur (1999):

The book titled 'Decentralization and local politics seiz' gave insight into the changing scenario of the panchayat raj system in the states of Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, west Bengal and Rajasthan. The detailed study of decentralized panchayat raj system and the

necessity of bringing administration to the rural areas has been discussed thoroughly. In this book the comparison is a striking feature between the states and also analytical comparison of the panchayat raj system with existing political issues attracts a reader.

#### 3. Maheshwari. R.S. (1999):

In her book titled Local government in India she explained the evolution of panchayat raj system in India and also she has given a clear frame work to her work with the various stages in which the panchayat raj system has been established in the country. The role of 'Grama sabha' in the working of panchayat has been focused in this book, which is very much a theme provider to the present work.

#### 4. Mahipal (2002):

The book, 'The role of panchayats in the reconstruction of rural India' detailed about the causes for the 73<sup>rd</sup> amendment act to the Indian constitution. The book also talks about the various ways of people's participation to strengthen and reconstruct local administration in local administration. And further talks about the role of government policies in the reconstruction of rural areas in building local self government.

#### 5. Rahul Mudgal (1998):

Rahul mudgal in his book 'Local self government in India' brought a detailed study about panchayat raj system in 13 chapters. His work has been a phenomenal on the local government systems in ancient India and also explains about the local self government in Madras province after independence. He also critically analyzed about the local self government in India this work is a great impetus for the present research work.

### Objectives of the study

1. To study the formation, progress and importance of standing committees.
2. To study the efficiency of standing committees at three tier Panchayath Raj System.

### Methodology

The study will be based on both primary and secondary data.

**i. Primary Data:** Primary data will be collected through structured questionnaire schedule having close ended and open ended questions pertaining in to the objectives among the selected area in the study area.

**ii. Secondary data:** The study also uses the secondary data on status and performance of standing committee at, country and

state level. The major sources of the secondary data are books, journals, research articles, newspapers, magazines, websites, government reports and statistical reports of various agencies etc.

The panchayat system, being the basic unit of tax collection it was given much importance. In the times of Vedas, Gupta, Moghals there were many interesting policy making at panchayat level this is because they vary in the degree of tax collection as well as village administration. By and large this system continued till the advent of the English into the country. After the entry of western people there are many changes in the administration at all levels but the changes at the bottom level called panchayat did not involve many changes because the English people lacked the local language and also they did not want to disturb the local system. With the outbreak of 1857 revolt Britishers realize that they need to find local services for the taxes they collect from the same area. In the year 1870 a concept of elected representatives in the urban municipalities by Lord Mayo to decentralize and to bring administrative efficiency.

The Bengal chowkidar act of 1870 empowered district magistrates to setup panchayats of nominated members to collect taxes in rural areas and the same is paid to the chowkidars or watchmen engaged by them. In 1874 the British also setup the local fund committees to facilitate local tax collection this was done in the wake of satisfying people from villages. With a view to bring self governing institutions, the then viceroy of India Lord Chelmsford, the secretary of state Montagu proposed the gradual development of free institutions in India with a view to ultimate self – government. This becomes the basic step towards achievement of self governments in India. After so many changes in the year 1935 an act was brought which was popularly called “The government of India act 1935” which became an important stage in the evolution of panchayats in British India. This was the result of the British aim to stay back in India for a prolonged period. However they were not interested in village autonomy. This it becomes a causative factor for losing centralized system of governance and village autonomy with this act the British government paved the way for self governance in India. The constitution of India which was drafted after independence is mostly on this act. This is the formal step where village panchayats were taken into consideration for the first time whose status obviously enriched with electorate system after independence.

India, after recurring independence aimed addressing whole country with their respective administration, Mahatma Gandhi, who was leading the whole campaign of independent India, emphasized the importance of “Swaraj” where the predominance of villages existing in India became the major issue to concentrate upon. The drafting committee of Indian constitution headed by Dr. B.R. Ambedkar addressed this Swaraj in the form of Panchayat raj under article 40 of the directive principles of state policy which reads, “The state shall take steps to organize village panchayats and endow them with such powers and authority as may be necessary to enable them function as units for self government”. This illusion did not make much impact of the panchayat raj system. What Gandhi dreamt of, was not fulfilled through execution. In view of this the first prime minister of independent India along with community development minister S. K. Das constituted a committee headed by Balvantray Mehta in January 1957 to examine the working of the community development programme (1952) and also the national extension service (1953) expecting for better working strategy of panchayat in India. After a long study of the existing phenomena of panchayat system in India, the committee submits its report in November 1957 with the recommendation of establishing the scheme of ‘Democratic decentralization’ which is finally known to be panchayat raj. The main purpose of panchayat raj was to settle down local problems locally and to increase the political awareness among the people. This is how the present panchayat raj system started its rooting formally. This committee's suggestions brought decentralization and effective functioning in local government institutions.

The committee listed out the five fundamental principles, which are

as follows

1. There should be a three tier structure of local self government bodies (gram panchayat at the village level, panchayat samiti at the block level, and zilla parishad at the district level), with direct elections at the village that is organically linked through a system of indirect elections, from village to the district level.
2. There should be genuine transfer of power and responsibility to these bodies.
3. The transfer of adequate resources to these bodies to enable them to discharge their functions and fulfill their responsibilities.
4. All welfare and development schemes and programs at all three levels should be implemented through these bodies, and
5. The three tier system should gradually facilitate further devolution and decentralization of power and responsibility.

The above recommendations were accepted by the national development council in 1958. The recommendations were merged into a tier system of panchayats known as zilla parishad, panchayat samiti and grama panchayat. The committee also emphasized promotion of agriculture, encouragement of peoples' participation in community work, promoting the welfare of the weaker sections and women through the panchayats. As a part of insisting the importance of panchayat raj institutions, the idealism in connection to panchayat raj institutions was included in the 3<sup>rd</sup> five year plan which reads, ‘The primary object of the panchayat raj was to enable people of each area to participate in intensive and continuous development in the interest of the entire population, the elected representatives should be encouraged to view development of panchayat raj institutions as offering new avenues of service to the people rather than opportunities for the exercise of the authority. This comes in the view to sustaining local interest, super vision and care as a representative and democratic institutions. It is to ensure that the local people must be secured in their rights and the local institutions must be the reasons to ensure overall security of the local areas.

The recommendations of Balvantray committee and the subsequent results in the form of panchayat raj institutions declined in their importance due to various reasons by mid sixties and thereafter. These institutions were weakened as the elections were not held regularly and also people did not take part active participation in political affairs. Along with these in efficiency, corruption, favoritism, uncertainty and irregularity of the panchayat raj institutions led to the downfall and also the government schemes came down and government reduced funding which led to bureaucracy to get upper hand and gradually the panchayat raj institutions remained as nominal bodies rather than functional units.

The drawbacks of Balvantray committee has been a matter of concern for further improvement in the system, the same has been seen in the form of ‘Ashok Mehta committee’ in the year 1977. The Janata government in the year 1977 appointed committee with the task of enquiring into the causes responsible for the poor performance of panchayat raj institution headed by Ashok Mehta as its chairman. The committee was also asked to suggest measures to strengthen panchayat raj institution. The striking feature of this committee's report is to give a constitutional protection to panchayat raj institution and further decentralization power at all levels with conducting regular elections.

The following are the some of the suggestion by the

1. The reservation of seats for the weaker sections
2. Two seats reserved for women
3. Adequate financial resources to be devolved to the panchayats
4. The requirement of constitutional mandates and
5. The need to promote and enable people's participation in development activities.

As the committee was result of Janata government's initiation the government of India did not implements the committee's

recommendations. A few states which include Karnataka have formulated their own legislations on this basis to make panchayat Raj institution work effectively. Apart from this committee there are other committees appointed to improve the local government where G.V.K Rao committee in 1985 and the Dr. L.M. Singhvi committee in 1986. G.V.K Rao committee went for Suggesting revival of Panchayat Raj institutions to make them more responsible in planning, implementation and monitoring of rural development programmes, As they can be assigned to them, Where as the L.M. Singhvi committee recommended for constitutional recognition of panchayat Raj institutions.

A major step of panchayat Raj institutions came in the year 1987 when India introduced the 64<sup>th</sup> constitutional amendment Bill on local government based on the recommendation of the Singhvi committee. By then prime Minister of India Rajiv Gandhi but he failed to bring it to the final stage as he had no enough strength in Rajya Sabha.

The similar effort was also seen from another Prime Minister V P Singh but the results were not different this time as well. But in the year 1991 under the prime ministership of PV Narasimha Rao, a fresh bill on Panchayat Raj, which was a dream of Rajiv Gandhi came with some modifications in the year 1992 and came into enforce as the 73<sup>rd</sup> amendment act on 24<sup>th</sup> March 1993. This remains a game changer in Indian Local Politics, which gave the constitutional states to Panchayat Raj institutions for the first time. This step of union Government made it mandatory for all the states to adopt the Bill in uplifting rural areas with the implementation of welfare programmes both from central & states.

Panchayat Raj institutions saw another striking changer after almost two decades of time in the form the Manishankar Aiyar committee on 'leveraging panchayat raj institutions for the more effective delivery of public goods and services', under the Chairmanship of Shari Manishankar Aiyar. Some of the committee's salient features are "The UPA government will ensure that all funds given to states for implementation of poverty alleviation and rural development schemes by panchayats are neither delayed nor diverted. In addition, after consultations with states, the UPA will consider crediting elected panchayats with such funds directly. Devolution of funds will be accompanied by similar devolution of functions and functionaries as well. The UPA government will ensure that the Gram Sabha is empowered to emerge as the foundation of Panchayati Raj".

That the "village panchayats," referred to in Article 40, and the "local authorities" referred to in List II, are described as "units" of "self-government" not "Self governance". These constitute the origins of Article 243G of part IX of the constitution which refers to the three-tier Panchayat Raj system as institutions of self-government, not self-governance.

### Conclusion

Overall the path of Panchayat Raj institution evolvement was not a easy one but the stages of strengthening the Panchayat Raj institutions made their progress step by step and the final shape of the present Panchayat Raj system is the in-depth study of various committees so far. It is said that the increasing communication and technological system really boosted up the progress of the rural areas through welfare programmes of centre and the states.

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