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PANCHAYATI RAJ SYSTEM IN ANDHRA PRADESH WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO CHITTOOR DISTRICT, ANDHRA PRADESH

KEY WORDS: Panchayati Raj System in India, Andhra Pradesh and Chittoor District

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ABSTRACT

Panchayati Raj in India is a system of local self-government by which the people in rural areas have taken on themselves the responsibilities for their socioeconomic and cultural development. Basically, it is thus an arrangement of participation of people in the administration of local affairs. The community development programme was first started under official guidance. Although there were a number of voluntary bodies of non-official nominated members associated, it was found out that such bodies were not of much use in creating enthusiasm among the people in securing their participation. The problem was thoroughly examined by the Balvantray Mehta Committee. It was on its recommendations that the advisory bodies have been abolished and statutory bodies were created to undertake the work of Community Development. Thus Panchayati Raj has been ushered in the country as a people's programme with officials participating in it on account of their technical knowledge and guidance.

INTRODUCTION

Government of India (GoI) enacted (1992) 73rd amendment to the Constitution to empower Panchayat Raj Institutions (PRIs) as local self-governing institutions to ensure a more participative governing structure in the country. The GoI further entrusted to the PRIs the implementation of various socio-economic development schemes including those enumerated in the Eleventh Schedule to the Constitution. The States, in turn, were required to entrust these local bodies with such powers, functions and responsibilities as to enable them to function as institutions of self-governance and implement schemes for economic development and social justice. Accordingly, State Government enacted Andhra Pradesh Panchayat Raj (APPR) Act in 1994 repealing all the existing Acts, to establish a three-tier system viz., Gram Panchayat (GP), Mandal Praja Parishad (MPP) and Zilla Praja Parishad (ZPP) at Village, Mandal and District levels respectively (Rachit Sharma and Aditya Bohra, 2015).

The present pattern of Panchayati Raj in the State is functioning under the Andhra Pradesh Panchayati Raj Act, 1994, which was enacted on 21st April of the same year in the light of the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act, 1993. The state of Andhra Pradesh has a total of 31 nagar panchayats. Prakasam district has the most nagar panchayats of six. The system later came to be known as Panchayati Raj, which was inaugurated by the then Prime Minister Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru on 2 October 1959 at Nagour in Rajasthan. There are three levels of Panchayati Raj system in Andhra Pradesh. This led to the establishment of a three-tier Panchayati Raj system: Gram Panchayat at the village level, Panchayat Samiti at the block level, and Zila Parishad at the district level. Balwant Rai Mehta was a parliamentarian when the committee was established. He is credited for pioneering the concept the Panchayati Raj in India and also known as Father of Panchayati Raj in India (Dayal, Rajeshwar, 1970).

Chittoor District

The state comprises 679 mandals, of which Chittoor district (66 mandals), has the most number of mandals and Vizianagaram district (34 mandals) has the fewest mandals in the state. Chittoor District is having 1372 Gram Panchayats covering 62 Mandals including seized Mandals.

73rd Amendment Act

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 Panchayati Raj Institutions are the nodal point at the district level. Their role is to help plan, coordinate, monitor and wherever required regulate the implementation

of various national programmes.

Functions of Panchayat Raj

Eleventh Schedule, to 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act, 1992, listed 29 subjects for devolution to strengthen the PRIs. During 2007-08, State Government devolved. 101 functions to PRIs and, thereafter, no functions were devolved. Funds relating to devolved functions are being released to PRIs through line departments concerned. The main functions of the panchayat raj are Sanitation, conservancy and drainage and the prevention of public nuisances.

- Curative and preventive measures in respect of any epidemic.
- Supply of drinking water and disinfecting the sources of supply and storage of water.
- The maintenance, repair, construction and protection of public streets

Article 40

Article 40 of the Constitution which enshrines one of the Directive Principles of State Policy lays down that the State shall take steps to organise village panchayats and endow them with such powers and authority as may be necessary to enable them to function as units of self-government.

Democratic Decentralisation

The fundamental change that panchayat raj introduced on November 1, 1959, was that samitis composed of popularly elected panchayat presidents with a few non-officials nominated to represent unrepresented sections like women, the scheduled castes and backward classes or local "experts," had replaced the previously existing block development committees. The Block Development Officer was the central figure in that set up with a few non-officials revolving round him as satellites while in the new set-up the panchayat samiti president, elected from among the members of the samiti constitutes that central figure with the BDO. The extension staff and the village level workers as the satellites - major and minor - revolving round him (Desai, 1962).

This organisational and institutional change answers the description of the scheme as "democratic decentralisation," because the Andhra Pradesh Government, having earned the compliment of being the first of the two States in the country to have implemented the scheme, is following it up by devolving on the panchayats, panchayat samitis and zilla parishads responsibility for the formulation and implementation of more and more programmes of development for the benefit of the local population. It must be said to its credit that Andhra has set the scheme going in a spirit of sincerity and willingness to help.

An objective and dispassionate evaluation of (the working of the panchayat raj in Andhra Pradesh in its various aspects alone can either justify or dispose of the apprehensions and objections on the score of its precipitate extension. But that will have to wait for some time. In the first place, one year is too short a time to assess the value, significance and success of a scheme of dimensions and ramifications as the panchayat raj scheme. In the second, part of this time was taken up by the panchayat samitis and parishads to settle down to their work, understand the scope of their powers and responsibilities and to formulate plans and so on. By now in the overwhelming majority of samitis and zilla parishads this process has been completed. They know where they stand and what they are expected to do and what they can, in fact, do or not do.

Therefore, what is possible and what is necessary at this stage is an examination, in a very broad way, as to how the rural population covered by the samitis have reacted or are reacting, both in terms of physical participation in, local development activities for which the initiative is being taken by popular bodies and of bringing a new attitude and outlook to the tasks that community development work through self-effort calls for. Broadly it can be said that the transition is going on smoothly and without much dislocation. There is commendable and encouraging response to efforts to introduce and popularise new and improved techniques in agricultural practices designed to increase agricultural production. For all measures intended to facilitate improvement of irrigation sources and utilisation of local irrigation potential such as minor irrigation tanks, wells, tube wells and pump-sets, there is ready response. There is enthusiastic participation by the cultivators in the tasks essential to improve existing irrigation sources and to create new ones.

Next to the programmes of agricultural development, other programmes or items of development work which evoke the largest, measure of participation from the villagers are broadly in the following order: village communications, such as the laying of approach roads; schools for the village children, and primary health centres. For programmes formulated by panchayat samitis in respect of those village needs, cooperation and participation of the village population assumes the form of not only producing the "matching" contribution provided for under the scheme but also of voluntary gifts of land or buildings. The matching contribution is made in a number of cases in cash collected from among the population of the entire samiti area but more commonly it is in shramadan or contributions in kind. The general pattern of participation indicates that villagers willingly make gifts or otherwise co-operate when a project is specifically for the benefit of their village (Jain, 1981).

There is, again broadly speaking, sufficient warrant for the feeling that while earlier under the community development programme and presently under the panchayat samiti. The rural development, projects which have an economic content receive high priority and evoke response from the villagers, programmes for social education in general, and those for producing psychological changes in the outlook of the villagers on social and community welfare in particular, receive little attention and evoke poor response.

This is inherent in the scheme itself, under which increase of food and agricultural production and next to it the creation of employment for the idle or under-employed is expected to receive prior consideration. But to the extent that social education and social welfare activities, which can prepare the minds and change the outlooks of the village population for understanding and discharging responsibilities which devolve on them or which provide opportunities for the improvement of the domestic environment and conditions of life of the village are essential, the unimportant and obviously secondary place accorded to them is disconcerting. These

activities are not altogether absent in samiti areas; in fact the schematic budgets for these bodies provide for social education and there are men and women social education organisers in the administrative staff under the samitis. The duties of the male social education officers, however, are very much undefined and they are used as odd job men by the samiti presidents and BDOs. This position requires immediate modification, if the rural population are to derive the maximum benefit from democratic decentralisation. The word "democratic" in that expression should be invested with meaning and significance by systematic efforts to inculcate the proper spirit and outlook among the rural population, on which ultimately the success of decentralisation would depend.

The broad question, and one to which very little attention has been paid in all that has been said in praise of panchayat raj in Andhra Pradesh during the anniversary celebrations, is how far the village projects initiated would be completed and to what extent provision has been made, in terms of "both allocation of funds and enlistment of local co-operation, for that purpose. Also related to it is the wider question of how far programmes and projects and works of local development initiated in some of the earlier established or stage 2 blocks are being continued and what provision is made for the proper upkeep and maintenance of those works and projects and for their continuance.

There is no dispute about the importance of their continuation and upkeep and there is no doubt that the extent to which this is being done represents the real and permanent effect that community development programmes have produced. There are murmurs that in the absence of adequate financial resources with the samitis in stage II, and in view of the reluctance of the samitis to impose fresh taxes to augment their resources and on the part of the people to pay additional taxes, continuation and maintenance work is impeded, indirectly these murmurings imply a plea to the State Government to make adequate grants-in-aid to the samitis and the village panchayats to prevent a situation in which while development is progressing in some areas and new programmes are being undertaken by samitis in stage stagnation does not overtake the so-called advanced samitis (Jathar, 1964).

One last but vital point is the highest importance to ensure that the panchayats, panchayat samitis and zilla parishads, at their respective levels, do not become the contending grounds for political partisans belonging to the rival groups within the Congress Party in Andhra Pradesh or to other rival political parties. It would be an evil day for panchayat raj and would be the end of all the hopes and expectations that its introduction has inspired, if political rivalry or factionalism invades these local self-govern bodies.

CONCLUSION

State Government is yet to devise a system for obtaining a consolidated picture about the finances of the PRIs. State Government devolved 10 out of 29 subjects listed in Eleventh Schedule to 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act, 1992. Accountability framework and financial reporting in PRIs are inadequate when non-recovery of amounts towards deviations found in social audit, non-conducting of inspections of ZPPs and GPs by departmental authorities, non-maintenance of cash books and stock registers, non-furnishing of utilisation certificates, non-remittance of unspent balances of closed schemes and advances pending adjustment, non-conducting of physical verification of stores and stock, non-reconciliation of departmental figures with treasury, non-disposal of misappropriation cases etc.

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