



Panchayat Raj system –An Assessment

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Abstract: *Panchayat Raj*, as we have seen in previous lessons is a growth process and is slowly acquiring result orientation characteristic. Now the local institutions of Panchayat Raj are looked upon as agents of development. The rural development which is multifaceted is a complex one requiring a variety of services which can be delivered effectively by local organizations capable of involving and mobilizing the human resources. A strong, vibrant local government is a means of political decentralization. There are several advantages of the Decentralization. Decision-making being closer to the people, decentralization ensures decision-makers more effective accountability to the governed. This also ensures more realistic programming, for local problems are apt to receive urgent attention. Local vigilance also increases; thereby reducing the room for corruption. This certainly goes a long way towards maximising returns on every rupee spent on development. These are some of the tangible advantages of decentralization.

Key words: Rural development, Panchayat Raj, Local vigilance, Community Development

1. Introduction:

Panchayat Raj, as we have seen in previous lessons is a growth process and is slowly acquiring result orientation characteristic. Now the local institutions of Panchayat Raj are looked upon as agents of development. The rural development which is multifaceted is a complex one requiring a variety of services which can be delivered effectively by local organizations capable of involving and mobilizing the human resources. The Panchayat Raj can take up the role of such organizations and usher in a social and economic revolution. In this lesson we discuss the impact of Panchayat Raj institutions which are trying to accomplish the above mentioned task. The impact is a fourfold (1) Political (2) Administrative (3) economic and sociological. The political impact is on the creation of leadership and it serves to

induce consciousness among the rural populace. The administrative consequences are considered in the light of official and non official relationship that is responsible for politico-social atmosphere prevailing in the rural areas. The economic impact is mainly concerned with the planning process and the implementation of the development programmes.

2. Evolution of Panchayati Raj System in India

A strong, vibrant local government is a means of political decentralization. There are several advantages of the Decentralization. Decision-making being closer to the people, decentralization ensures decision-makers more effective accountability to the governed. This also ensures more realistic programming, for



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The Community Development Programme

On 15 August 1947, India got an opportunity of redeeming the pledges made to the people during the long-drawn freedom movement. Among the first tasks that India had to assume was the formulation and execution of the first five year plan in the fifties. Post-Independence, the first major development programme launched in India was Community Development Programme in 1952. Core philosophy was overall development of rural areas and people's participation. This programme was formulated to provide an administrative framework through which the government might reach to the district, tehsil / taluka and village level. All the districts of the country were divided into "Development Blocks" and a "Block Development Officer (BDO)" was made in charge of each block. Below the BDO were appointed the workers called Village Level Workers (VLW) who were responsible to keep in touch with 10-12 villages. So, a nationwide structure was started to be created. Thousands of BDOs and VLW's were trained for the job of carrying out array of government programmes and make it possible to reach the government to villages. Top authority was "Community Development Organization" and a Community Development Research Center was created with best academic brains of the country at that time. This programme was not successful. It's failure was

directly attributed to inadequacy of avenues of popular participation in local level programmes of rural development. This was the finding of the team for the study of community projects and national extension service under the chairmanship of Balwant Rai Mehta, reporting in 1959.

Balwant Rai Mehta Committee Report

In 1957, the Balwant Rai Mehta Committee was appointed to study the Community Development Programmes and National Extension Services Programme especially from the point of view of assessing the extent of people's participation and to recommend the creation of the institutions through which such participation can be achieved. The Balwant Rai Mehta committee recommended a 3-tier Panchayati Raj System which includes Zila Parishad at the District Level Panchayat Samiti at the Block/ Tehsil/ Taluka Level Gram Panchayat at the Village Level But the committee did not insisted on a rigid pattern. It recommended that the states should be given freedom to choose and develop their own patterns as per the local conditions. The committee recommended that the above 3 tiers should be organically linked together through an instrument of indirect election. The committee recommended that the Gram Panchayats should be constituted with directly elected representatives, whereas the Panchayat Samiti and Zila Parishad should be the constituted with indirectly elected members.

The recommendations of the Balwant Rai Mehta committee were accepted by the National Development Council in 1958 and subsequently Rajasthan in 1959 became the first state in India to launch the Panchayati Raj. The institution of



Panchayati Raj was inaugurated by Jawahar Lal Nehru on October 2, 1959 in Nagaur District of Rajasthan. Nine days later, Andhra Pradesh became the second state to launch Panchayati Raj at Shadnagar near Hyderabad. The launch of the Panchayati Raj institutions was a thumping success and soon the states started adopting the institutions. T

Santhanam Committee: 1963 The Balwant Rai Mehta Committee was followed by the Santhanam Committee. This committee was formed by the Government of India to solve the following important practical questions. How and in what ratio, the revenues should be handed over to PRIs? What should be the criteria of sanction of grants to them by State Government? What should be the status of the Financial Relations between the different levels of PRIs? So, in a nutshell, the Santhanam Committee's scope of study was the financial matters of the PRIs. The important recommendations this committee made are as follows: The Panchayati Raj Finance Corporations should be established. All the grants at the state level should be sent in a consolidated form to various PRIs. Panchayats should have power to levy special tax which should be based upon the land revenue and house tax etc.

Ashok Mehta Committee: 1977: One of the major issues in context with the PRIs was that it got dominated by the privileged section of the village society. In December 1977, the Janta Government appointed a 13 member committee which was headed by Mr. Ashok Mehta. The committee was appointed for following: What are the causes responsible for poor performance of the PRIs? What measures should be taken to improve performance of the PRIs? The Ashok Mehta committee

submitted its report in 1978 and made more than 130 recommendations. The essence of Ashok Mehta Committee recommendations is as follows: 3-tier should be replaced by the 2-tier system. The upper tier would be the Zila Parishad at the district level and lower tier should be the Mandal Panchayat, which should be a Panchayat of group of villages covering a population of 15000 to 20000. The committee recommended that the base of the Panchayati Raj system should be a Mandal Panchayats. Each Mandal panchayat should contain 15 members directly elected by the people. The head of the Mandal Panchayat should be elected among the members themselves. Zila Parishad should be the executive body and made responsible for planning at the district level. The Zila Parishad members should be elected as well as nominated. The MLA and MPs of the area should have the status of Ex-officio chairmen of the Zila Parishads. Development functions should be transferred to the Zila Parishad and all development staff should work under its control and supervision. Thus, we see that the Ashok Mehta Committee recommended abolishing the middle tier i.e. Blocks as unit of administration. It recommended that the district should be the first point for decentralization under popular supervision below the state level.

G V K Rao Committee, 1985: The Ashok Mehta Committee was followed by GVK Rao Committee in 1985. This committee was appointed prior to the 7th Five Year Plan, to recommend on an integrated concept for growth and poverty alleviation. The committee had the following tasks: Examine the existing administration structure for rural development and detail out the functions and revenue resources of the PRIs



Recommend the administrative arrangements for rural development and poverty alleviation programmes. The district level Zila Parishad should be the basic unit for policy planning and programme implementation. The Zila Parishad should be the pivotal body for the scheme of the democratic decentralization. The State level planning functions should be transferred to the Zila Parishad for effective decentralized planning.

L M Singhvi Committee: 1986 A year after the GVK Rao committee, the Government of India set up Dr. L M Singhvi Committee. The prime minister was Rajiv Gandhi. The LM Singhvi Committee was of the view that the Panchayati Raj Institutions declined in the country because of – Absence of a clear concept Absence of political will Lack of Research, evaluation and monitoring. The committee was in favour of making ways for the PRIs to ensure the availability of the enough financial resources. The LM Singhvi Committee is best known for recommending the constitutional status for Panchayats. The committee was in favour of making ways for the PRIs to ensure the availability of the enough financial resources.

Singhvi Committee versus Sarkaria Commission: The above recommendations of the Singhvi Committee, though revolutionary, were opposed by the Sarkaria Commission on Centre-State Relations, which submitted its report in 1988. This commission was of the view that enacting any law on the Panchayats is exclusive power vested in the states and rather than adding a new chapter in the Constitution, there should be a uniform law, applicable throughout India. A model bill can be drafted on the basis of consensus among all the state at

the level of Interstate Council.

64th Amendment Bill : Despite the contradictory view of the Sarkaria Commission, the government had zeroed in on giving constitutional protection to the PRIs. In this regard, the 64th amendment bill was introduced in the parliament by Rajiv Gandhi Government on 15 May 1989. The bill got lapsed because it could not pass in Rajya Sabha. This was on 15 October 1989. On 27 November 1989, the tenure of the Rajiv Gandhi government ended and elections were held. Rajiv Gandhi lost the elections, and the result was a minority government under V.P. Singh and the National Front. This was the first minority government, since 1947, with the help of the Left Parties and Bharatiya Janta Party, who supported the government from outside.

74th amendment Bill : The VP Singh Government introduced the 74th Constitutional Amendment Bill on September 7, 1990. This bill also got lapsed because the minority Government of VP Singh collapsed leading to dissolution of the Lok Sabha. 72nd Amendment Bill and **73rd Amendment Act** The 72nd amendment Bill was enshrining a comprehensive amendment of the Constitution and was introduced on 10th September, 1991 by G. Venkat Swamy. The bill was passed in the Lok Sabha on December 22, 1992 and the Rajya Sabha on December 23, 1992.

73rd Amendment Act 1993 w.e.f April 24, 1993. Thus, April 24, 1993 became the landmark day in the history of Panchayati Raj in India. By this amendment act, a new Part IX was inserted in the Constitution of India enshrining the provisions for the



Panchayats. Here please note that Original part IX was repealed by one the amendments of the constitution. Constitution (Seventy Forth Amendment) Act, 1992 has introduced a new part Part IXA in the Constitution, which deals with Municipalities.

3. Impact of PRIs

Political impact: The panchayat Raj has shown greater political potential than economic and sociological. The Panchayat Raj institutions with devolution of powers to them have begun to show the signs of tendency of making the means an end. The political power is not an end here. On the other hand it is a means to make an institution function effectively to fulfill its purpose. Realizing this the two mehata committees supported the view that the institutions should set in a new trend in creation of village leadership. But the practice is the emergence of leadership from the persons ranking high in social hierarchy and economic prosperity. It brings to the fore the feudal lords and money lenders though not necessarily of higher castes and this trend spells danger to the society and thwarts the purpose of the government of alleviation of poverty as this greedy class swindles the people of the benefits intended for them. Such leadership is individual oriented and traditional. As such the Panchayat Raj institutions should play perse a decisive role in building up a leadership based on resourcefulness and service orientation.

Another political consequences of Panchayat Raj is the linking up of local leadership with that of the state. To the state leader it looks like a basis for a vote bank. Moreover the Panchayat Raj serves to build foundation at the grassroot level for the crystallization of political forces. Every political party tries to build a

political base with an eye over power. Though it may lead to polarization of conflicting interests disturbing the peace and tranquility of that area, this trend is looked upon as a part of democratic process giving birth to political consciousness among the people. This awakens the villagers to their rights helping them to put an end and to their exploitation at the hands of the unscrupulous elements. Thus the Panchayat Raj not only provides a training ground to the rural people for democratic leadership but creates opportunities too for them to acquire adequate political wisdom to manage their own affairs.

The one sad state of affairs is that factionalism creeps across the rural society due to the fervor inherent in the elections that are conducted from time to time. The traditional Indian society unable to understand the spirit of democracy lands in a trouble of splitting itself into a number of groups relative to the number of political parties or to the number of castes adjusting there in.

Impact on administration:

Our study of political impact would be incomplete without any reference to the administrative consequences. The most baffling situation is the strained relationship between the officials and the non officials, the tension and conflict between the BDO and the samithi president will destruct and undermine the Panchayat Raj institutions and their working so much show that the implementation of the development programs will be hampered. On the other hand a cordially relationship between the two functionaries will help the Panchayat Raj institutions realize their purpose and



boost up the developmental process. A close look at their relationship reveals that the personnel elements and traits play a vital role in shaping of and determining their behavioral pattern. For instance a tactful and sincere, BDO and a good president of samithi can maintain a good relation. This brings us to realise the fact that sometimes the state leader harasses the administrators at the instance of local politicians on the one hand and the state level administrators shielding the erring BDOs and supporting their improper treatment of improper non officials on the other will ultimately result in the eradication of the Panchayat Raj institutions. Hence such tendencies should be curbed. Personnel differences if any between the officials and the non officials should not be allowed to surface as their many festations are sure to divide the samithi staff into two groups, one supporting the BDO and the other the samithi president. This will definitely lead to the negligence of duties on the part of the staff and encourage the playoff whims and fancies much to the institutional disadvantages.

Another administrative consequence is that the samithi office is more or less run on the lines of bureaucratic office with it is ill like redtapism, formalism and inhumanism. Hence an advice is given to debureaucratise the samithi office headed by an elected representatives. It means bringing the people closer to the administration by encouraging them to have rapport with the BDO and the other officials. At the same time the officials also should be encouraged to develop closer links with the people in order to serve them better. It suggested democratization of the administration this respect, which means keeping away

the administrative machinery of the samithi office and the zilla parishad from the evils of the conventional office of the administration.

Economic impact:

The economic impact has to be viewed from two angles first the role of the Panchayat Raj institutions in process of planning from below and secondly its implementation. As regards the first role, a sorry figure has to be cut on account of the lack of resourcefulness at the grassroot levels sometimes and due to lack of knowledge on the part of the officials other times. The lack of will is also said to be the cause for the failure of the Panchayat Raj in this respect. Some Panchayat Samithis and Zilla Parishads fails to inspire the people in the value and the importance of planning and thereby are not able to secure their involvement. Added to this is the lack of knowledge on the part of the officials and the non officials about available resources in their areas. Aligned with this is sometimes the over ambitious planning due to over enthusiasm and this results in the rejection by the central planning Board or the state planning Board of the plans so devised by the local bodies. All these factors make the panchayat Raj institutions a failure in preparing an effective planning for rural development.

The Panchayat Raj Institutions have no impact on the industrial sector since the rural development has been conceived as agricultural development only. Even in the respect of agricultural sector, the problem of raising productively by improving agricultural practices and tools has not yet been resolved. From improvement of methods and tool finances are needed but the institutions could not get them either in



shape of loans or funds due to apathy on the part of the government and the failure of the banking sector in advancing adequate sums.

Sociological impact:

The Panchayat Raj institutions which are expected to become an instrument of social change in rural India have failed the elected representatives and the officials could not do anything to provide impetus to the forces of social change. The elitist characteristic of both the groups prevented them from achieving this purpose of the social change. Now let us see how these institutions have improved the conditions of the weaker section in the rural society. Despite the huge amounts sanctioned and spent by the central and state governments the conditions of the downtrodden have not yet ameliorated. The efforts of the Panchayat Raj institutions are rather discouraging. To our dismay the official and non-official elements have shielded the persons indulging in heinous crime of untouchability. The recent hike in the attacks on the scheduled castes by the higher strata of society in many states lays bare the truth and exposes the rural psyche which conceals ill will against these sections neglected and snubbed for ages together. The government has failed to put the Panchayat Raj on right wheels. However some efforts have been made by some states like Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and of late by the government of India to reserve some seats on panchayat bodies with a view to improving their lot. But there is some criticism in some quarters attributing ulterior motives to them. But we have to wait and see the implications and impact of this reservation policy and know

whether it enhances the status of these sections.

4. Conclusion:

By evaluating the performance of the Panchayat Raj, we have seen socio-economic and political impact on the rural population. Sociologically the panchayat Raj institutions have rendered negative service. Instead of uprooting the social evils and setting in motion a change in the attitudes of the people, they themselves have got entangled in the ills of the society and contributed to their rise. They also could not do their job successfully in formulating plans due to the absence of will and knowledge on the part of the officials and non-officials, The conflicts between the above two served to split the administrative machinery into two warring groups much to the disadvantage of the people. The inadequate funds and loans could only thwart aspirations of the people. The power drunk politician and the arrogant bureaucrat have failed to carry out the mission of the Panchayat Raj. Suggestions are made to overcome the organizational deficiencies and functional defects. The personal elements, traits and temperament are to be improved upon to avoid the conflicts between the politicians and the officials. Provision of the required funds and sums will invigorate the institutions to carry out their programmes successfully. The reservation of seats on the panchayat bodies for women and weaker sections will go a long way in improving their social status. Thus the panchayat Raj institutions can become stronger and serve the purpose for which they created.

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