

Effectiveness of Panchayati Raj Systems, Problems and National Declaration

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Particularly, in the developing countries, to operate a highly democratic form of government, local self government institutions can play very vital role in the process of political legitimisation and develop a sense of public participation for the best implementation of the political as well as the social and economic integrity of the local environments. The effectiveness of democracy greatly depends on the association of the people at diverse administrative fields. The Panchayati Raj has been introduced in India with a view to associating people with administration at the grassroot level and people have been assigned an active role in the formulation and implementation of their plans.

The Panchayati Raj has been introduced in India in pursuance of article 40 of the constitution which directs the government to take necessary steps to organize village panchayats and endow them with such power and authority which may be necessary to enable them to work as units of self government. Accordingly, the government appointed a committee, under Balwantrai Mehta which recommended a three-tier system of rural local self government institutions. On the basis of these recommendations, Panchayati Raj institutions were introduced in a number of states.

Meheta's Three Tier System

The Panchayat is an executive body of the village ward members headed by the

Sarapanch. It mainly consists of the representatives elected by the people of the villages. There is also a provision of two women and one schedule caste and schedule tribe if they do not get adequate representation in the normal course. The panchayat is a body accountable to the general body of the villages known as Gramasabha. As regards the main function performed by the village panchayat, they include maintenance of roads, wells, schools, burning and burial grounds, sanitation, public health, street lighting, libraries, reading rooms, community centres.

The panchayat also keeps records of birth and deaths. It takes necessary measures for promotion of agriculture and animal husbandry, Cottage industries, Co-operative societies etc. Some times minor disputes among the denizens of villages are also settled by the village panchayat.

Panchayat Samitis or Block Level Bodies

The block is the intermediary in the three tier system and is the centre of developmental work. The panchayat samiti consist of by taking

- (a) about 20 members elected by all the panchayats in the block;
- (b) two women members and one member from SC and one from ST, if they do not posses adequate representation otherwise by the process.

Panchayat Samiti is headed by a chairman elected by the members of the samiti.

The main work of the panchayat samiti is to co-ordinate and to supervise various activities of the panchayats. It also looks after the developmental aspects within its jurisdiction.

Zilla Parishad

Zilla parishad is at the apex of three tier systems and treated as the higher developmental agency in the State. The organization of zilla parishad differs from state to state. Still, it consists of the elected members of the panchayat samitis, members of the state legislature and parliament, medical officers of the district, district collector, officers of agriculture, veterinary, education engineering, public works, public health etc. Being a developmental body, its main function is supervisory within its areas. It approves budgets of the panchayat samitis in certain states and also gives necessary advice to the government regarding the implementation of programme and developmental works. Besides this, it deals in maintenance of education, dispensaries, hospital minor education etc.

Significance of Panchayati Raj

The democratic decentralization took its shape with a view to better administration and developmental perspectives for quick rural development and co-operations of local people. State government does not possess adequate wisdom of local affairs and problems. In this sense, it constitutes a significant contribution to the theory and practice of nation building activities in the developing areas.

Problems

Diverse and huge problems in the functions and working patterns of the Panchayati Raj system which we are facing in the day to day activities can be broadly described as mentioned below.

Initially, the domination of the bureaucracy over PRIs. The agent of implementation of all major programmes (CDP or IRDP) has always been the State administration, various parallel bodies that have grossly undermined the importance of the PRIs.

Secondly, inadequate financial resources to carry out the administration is a serious problem. The grant-in-aid is the major component of the PRI revenue. The government should realize this difficulty and try to solve it permanently.

Besides, other major problems are also affecting the structure. These are

- (a) incompatible relations among the three tiers;
- (b) undemocratic composition of various P.R. institutions;
- (c) political bias; and
- (d) un-cordial relation between officials and people.

National Declaration for Local Self Governance

In the year April 2002 there was a conference regarding Panchayati Raj held in New Delhi. It was significant for two reasons.

- (a) It diagnosed the problems of panchayats.
- (b) Recommended the prescriptions which, if implemented, can ensure proper devolution of power from the State Governments to the grass root levels.

Inaugurated by the Prime Minister, the conference was attended by 1600 elected heads of 3,40,000 panchayats from across the country. The conference called for amending the constitution if necessary. So that the panchayats could become autonomous both financially and functionally.

The vital theme of the conference was the adoption of a 15 point recommendation or the national declaration for local self governance. The major highlights include :

1. The District Rural Development Agency (DRDA) and other parallel bodies should be brought under the control of respective Zilla Parishad with the chair person of the parishad as head.
2. The State Government should implement the recommendations of the state financial commissions and enable the Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) to raise requisite resources.
3. The centre should provide non budgetary resources as loans to PRIs.

4. The panchayat should have a panchayat planning committee to advise the panchayats in formulating the developmental plans
5. The district planning committee should be made functional by December 31, 2002.
6. The centre and state will make provisions for training panchayat representatives

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