

## **Transforming India through Panchayati Raj Institutions**

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**Abstract:** The Panchayati Raj Institution is important for India, because it fulfills the aspirations of the rural people and helps in transforming the country. The Panchayati Raj Institution has been playing a vital role in India's transformation. Mahatma Gandhi coined the term "Gram Swaraj" which refers to an idea of self-reliant and self-sufficient village. He had a dream that all villages should be characterized by participatory democracy for the real devolution of the ground. The Constitution of India provides Article 40 to fulfill Gandhi's dream of Gram Swaraj. The Panchayati Raj Institution has three-tier structure that is Gram Panchayat at the village level, Panchayat Samiti at the block level and, Zilla Parishad at the district level. But very soon, it was realized that the Institution at the ground level was suffering from frequent dismissal and lack of resources. To strengthen Panchayati Raj Institutions in a better way, two landmark historical Amendment bills were introduced in the Parliament. These two bills emerged as 73rd Amendment Act, deals with the Rural Areas Development (Panchayat) and 74th Amendment Act with the Urban Areas Development (Municipalities). An important feature of the 73rd Amendment Act is the structure of Gram Sabha which exists at the village level. Gram Sabha is regarded as the smallest unit of administration. Panchayati Raj Institution is also known as Local self-Government because it ensures people's participation at the grassroots level and involves them in the decision-making process of the Government. It also provides basic infrastructure facilities, empowering weaker section of the society and initiative development process at the grassroots level. The paper will focus upon the role of Panchayati Raj Institutions particularly after the promulgation of the 73rd Amendment Act.

Key words:- Transforming India, Panchayati Raj Institution, Gram Panchayat, Gram Sabha, Panchayat Samiti, Zilla Parishad, , 73rd Amendment Act,

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### **I. INTRODUCTION**

"The future of India lies in its villages"- Mahatma Gandhi

India lives in villages. Around 72% of its population resides in the rural areas. The development of a Nation is largely depends upon the development of its entire areas. For this development, the power should be democratically decentralized. Democratic decentralization is a process where powers are decentralize among the Central Government, various State Governments and a large number of Local Governments. Democratic decentralization is also known as Panchayati Raj System. The Panchayati Raj Institutions have been the backbone of the Indian villages. It is a process where people are directly participated in the decision making process of the Government. It provides basic infrastructure facilities, empowering weaker section of the society and initiative development process at the ground level. It aims is to involves the rural people at the grassroots level administration. If people of the rural areas are not empowered, the Nation could not develop. Through Panchayati Raj Institutions, people have the responsibility to formulate and implement their own plans and to develop their own areas. The word "Panchayat" literally means "assembly of five wise people", who are elected by the villagers. Lord Rippon is regarded as the Father of Local Self- Government in India. (Dutta, 2014) Mahatma Gandhi was the first philosopher who coined the term "Gram Swaraj" which referred to Panchayati Raj with the idea of self-sufficient and self-reliant villages. He had a dream that all villages should be characterized by direct and participatory democracy and gives all power to the villagers (Giri, 2008). On 26th January 1950, the Constitution of India came into force and provides Article 40 to fulfill Gandhi's dream of Gram Swaraj. Article 40 of the constitution directs the Government to organize Village Panchayats and endow them with such power and authority to enable them to work as units of self- government. At the time of Independence, India had faced serious problems related to poverty, agriculture, education, health, sanitation, communication and infrastructure etc. These problems were a major challenge for a newly independent state like India to create a welfare state. The Government had introduced many welfare programmes to solve these problems and gave focused on the development of both rural and urban areas. For this purposed the Community Development Programme (1952) and the National Extension Service (1952) were launched. The Community Development Programme gave emphasized to bring socio-economic development in rural areas. The aim of

National Extension Service was intended to cover the entire country with an organization for agriculture and rural development with a period of about 10 years. But these two programmes were failed to achieve their goals because of lack of people's participation in rural developmental programmes (Mallik, 2002). In January 1957, the Govt. of India appointed the Balwant Rai Mehta committee under the Chairmanship of Balwant Rai Mehta. This committee examined the working of the Community Development Programme and the National Extension Service and suggested some possible recommendations. In November 1957 the committee submitted its report and recommended the establishment of 'Democratic Decentralization', which later known as 'Panchayati Raj'. This committee also recommended for the establishment of 3-tier structure in Panchayati Raj system such as Gram Panchayat at village level, Panchayat Samiti at block level and Zilla Parishad at district level. Rajasthan is the first state in the country to introduce Panchayati Raj system on 2nd October 1959.

To strengthen Panchayati Raj Institution, in 1992 the Government of India had introduced 73rd Amendment bill in the Parliament. On 24th April 1993, the 73rd Amendment Act 1992 came into force to provide constitutional status to the Panchayati Raj Institutions. This act provides 3-tier structure to Panchayati Raj Institution such as Gram Panchayat at village level, Panchayat Samiti at block level and Zilla Parishad at district level. But the States of Goa, Jammu & Kashmir, Mizoram, Meghalaya, Nagaland and Sikkim have two-tier Panchayat- one at the village level and the second at the Zilla or District level. In Jammu & Kashmir, block is the second level.

### **73rd Amendment Act, 1992**

Part-IX of the Indian constitution entitled as "The Panchayats" and it consists of several provisions from Article 243 to 243O. Article 243G of the constitution is regarded as the heart of the Panchayati Raj System. The 11th schedule of the Indian constitution was added in 1992 and it contains 29 items of the Panchayats. The salient features of this Act are:-

1. Article 243 defines about democratic decentralization such as the meaning of District, Gram Sabha, Intermediate level, Panchayat, Panchayat areas, Population and Village.
2. Article 243A provides Constitutional Status to Gram Sabha of every village. It is regarded as village assembly which consisting of all the registered voters of a Panchayat area.
3. Article 243B provides for a three-tier structure to every Panchayati Raj institutions of a state such as Gram Panchayat at village level, Panchayat Samiti at block level and Zilla Parishad at district level.
4. Article 243C provides that all the members of the Panchayat shall be directly elected by the people. But the Chairperson of the Panchayat Samiti and Zilla Parishad shall be elected indirectly.
5. Article 243D provides for the reservation of seats to the people belonging from Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribes in proportion to their population in the Panchayat areas. This act also provides 33% of reservation seats to women in Panchayat election.
6. Article 243E provides that every Panchayat hold its office for the period of 5 years. But if unfortunately the Panchayat dissolves before completion of its term, then a compulsory election would be conducted within 6 month of its dissolution.
7. Article 243F provides disqualifications for membership. A person shall be disqualified under any law made by the state legislature but no person shall be disqualified on the ground that he is less than 25 years of age. The minimum age is 25 years.
8. Article 243G provides the powers, authority and responsibility of the panchayat to prepare plans for economic development and social justice within Panchayat areas.
9. Article 243H provides power to impose taxes by the Panchayat.
10. Article 243I deals with the State Finance Commission which review the financial provision of the Panchayat. The State Finance Commission is established by the Governor of the State.
11. Article 243J provides that the state legislature is empowered to make a provision to the maintenance of accounts of the Panchayats.
12. Article 243K provides for the appointment of State Election Commission which to ensure free and fair elections to the Panchayat at all level. The State Election Commissioner to be appointed by the Governor.
13. Article 243L provides that not only the States but also all the Union Territories should have to apply the Panchayati Raj System.
14. Article 243M provides that this act does not apply to the scheduled areas referred to in clause (1) and the tribal areas clause (2) of Article 244. Such areas are Nagaland, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Manipur and Darjeeling.
15. Article 243N deals with the continuance of existing laws and Panchayat. It means if the state legislative assembly has dissolved before its expiration, then the law made by the Panchayat should be continued till its 5 years term.
16. Article 243O bars the interference by court in the electoral matters of the Panchayats. It provides that no court has power to interfere in the electoral matters of the Panchayat (Nanda, 2015).

### **Three -Tier Structure of Panchayati Raj Institutions**

#### **Gram Panchayat**

Gram Panchayat is the lowest unit of the Panchayati Raj Institutions. It exists at the village level. Village is the basic unit of Panchayati Raj Institutions. The Gram Panchayat or the Village Panchayat consists of by the people's representatives. These representatives are directly elected by the villagers. The head of the Gram Panchayat is known as Sarpanch. He is responsible for the development of the Panchayat area. He supervises and coordinates the various activities of the Panchayat. The Panchayat Secretary and Village Level Worker are the two government officials at the Panchayat level to assist the Sarpanch in administration. In Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra and Rajasthan it is known as Panchayat, In Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Orissa, Punjab, West Bengal, it is known as Gram Panchayat and Assam, Gujarat and Uttar Pradesh it is known as Gaon Panchayat. ” (Maheswari, 2015) The Gram Panchayat performs the following functions

- To organize various welfare programme and awareness campaign for the rural people. Such programmes like NREGA, PMAY, DWCRA, TRYSEM, BPGY, GGY etc.
- Registers the name of the people about birth and death rate of the area.
- To provide light facility in the village.
- To provide safe drinking water to the people.
- To prohibit the sale or liquor without license.

Below the Gram Panchayat, the Gram Sabha is exists. Gram Sabha is an important feature of the 73rd Amendment Act, which exists at the village level. Gram Sabha is regarded as the cornerstone of Panchayati Raj System. Article 243A describes about the Gram Sabha. It is the lowest unit of the system of democratic decentralization. Gram Sabha consists of all the adult residents of the villages whose name are registered in the electoral rolls of the Gram Panchayat. The adult voters directly participate in decision making process of the Gram Sabha and structure performs its duty like a 'watch dog' (Joshi et al., 2002) to see the day today activities of the Panchayat. It is a statutory body and an assembly of villagers. Gandhiji argued, "True democracy cannot be worked out by twenty men sitting at the centre. It has to be worked out from below by the people of every village though there will be a Central Government" (Mohanty, 2007). The Gram Sabha meets at least twice in a year and the quorum for the meeting shall not be less than one tenth of the total number of members of the body. The Gram Sabha performs the following functions; these are

- To examine the annual statement of accounts and audit report of the Panchayat.
- To make discussion on various Governmental schemes and identify beneficiaries.
- To give assistance in the implementation of the development schemes.
- To implement plans before they are taking place by the Gram Panchayat.
- To considered levy of taxes and fees at the local level.
- To considered the budget prepared by the Gram Panchayat.
- To organize community service and develop agricultural production plans at the village.
- To protect tradition and customs of people in the schedule area.
- To considered all matters referred by the Gram Panchayat.

#### **Panchayat Samiti**

Panchayat Samiti is the second level of Local Self- Government in rural India. It establish at the Block level. The Panchayat Samiti plays a role of mediator between the Gram Panchayat and Zilla Parishad. Generally, a Panchayat Samiti consists of 20 to 60 villages depending on area and population. The Panchayat Samiti consists of by Sarpanch of all Gram Panchayat, Chairman of Municipality and N.A.C., members of State Legislature and Parliament come under Samiti area. Also peoples from Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes have their special privilege in Panchayat Samiti. One-third seats are also reserved for women members. The Chairman and Vice- Chairman of the Panchayat Samiti are elected by the people. The tenure of Panchayat Samiti is 5 years. Besides these elected members, the State Government has appointed an executive officer known as Block Development Officer (BDO) who executes and implements the Government Scheme within the Samiti area. Panchayati Samiti performs two types of functions such as compulsory and optional functions. Following are some important functions performs by the Panchayat Samiti,

- Construction, repair and maintenance of public wells, ponds and tanks.
- Supply of water for domestic use like bathing, washing and for drinking.
- Lighting of village streets.
- Construction of public roads.
- Development of agriculture, promotion of cottage industry.
- Establishment, management and regulation of public markets.
- Promotion of education.
- Establishment of hospitals and health care services.

- Establishment of youth and farmers clubs.

#### Zilla Parishad

The Zilla Parishad is the topmost and third tier structure of the Panchayati Raj system. It is an apex body of Panchayati Raj Institutions. It is situated at the district level. It is an elected body and its members are elected by the people from different wards of the district. The term of each Zilla Parishad is 5 years. The Zilla Parishad consist of representatives of the Panchayat Samiti in the district, all members of the State Legislature (M.L.A. & M.L.C.) and Parliament representing the district, the president of the district Co-operative Society. There is also a provision for reservation of seat for Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and women member. The Zilla Parishad is headed by a President and Vice- President, both elects among its members. The Collector is the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the Zilla Parishad. He supervises the functions of the Zilla Parishad and executes various development schemes introduced by the Government. The functions of the Zilla Parishad are

- It exercises all functions as may given by the State Government.
- It examines and approves the budget of all the Panchayat Samiti in the district.
- It gives directions to the Panchayat Samiti for effective functioning.
- It advices the state government on all matters relating to development activities in the district.
- It distributes funds to the Panchayat Samiti allocated by the State Government.
- It informs the district Collector about any irregularities committed by the Gram Panchayats and Panchayat Samiti in the district.(Krishnan, 1992 )

#### **Role of Panchayati Raj Institutions in India's transformation:-**

The Ministry of Panchayati Raj Institutions was established in May 2004. It looks into all matters relating to Panchayati Raj Institutions. The Panchayati Raj Institutions plays an important role to make India as a vibrant India. All the plans, policies, rules, regulations and poverty alleviation schemes are formulated by the Central Government and State Government, but it is the Panchayati Raj Institutions which properly implemented these Governmental Schemes at the ground level. At the ground level, the Gram Sabha plays an important role to implement the Government scheme. In every year at least two Gram Sabha meeting is held by the Gram Panchayat. The Gram Panchayat is bound to obey all the decision made by the people at this meeting. The followings are some of the important functions performed by the Panchayati Raj Institutions in India

1. Accelerated Rural Water Supply Programme (ARWSP) and Swajaldhara are the two main programmes of the Central Government relating to drinking water supply. The Panchayat is responsible to properly implement these two drinking water schemes at the village level.
2. The primary responsibility of the Panchayat is to maintaining cleanliness in village. The Gram Panchayat is organizing Total Sanitation Campaign (TSC) to establish community latrines and to eliminate open-air-defection.
3. The Central Government has launched the National Rural Health Mission (NRHM) and Ayushman Bharat programmes to provide better health care service to the rural people. The Gram Sabha organizes awareness campaign in the village.
4. The Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS) has launched by the Government. It aims is to improve the nutritional and health status of pre-school children as well as pregnant women of the village.
5. To provide Housing to the rural poor, the Government had launched Indira Awas Yojana (IAY) now it is called as Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (PMAY). The primary duty of the Gram Panchayat and Gram Sabha is to select the genuine beneficiaries who are comes under Below the Poverty Line.
6. The Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana has launched by the Government to provide concrete road communication service in the village.
7. The Rajiv Gandhi Grameen Vidyutikaran Yojana (RGGVY) is the major rural electrification scheme of the Government. Its aim is to providing electricity facilities in all villages of India.
8. The Panchayat enhances people's participation in the decision making process of the Government. It also increases women and weaker section involvement in policies making.
9. The Panchayat promotes women empowerment through Self Help Group.
10. The Panchayat establishes primary and secondary school at village level and college at block level and also set up free Hostels for SCs and STs Students.
11. The Panchayat prepares plans for the development of agriculture, animal husbandry, fisheries etc.
12. The Panchayat provides proper marketing facilities to the farmers to sell their product.
13. The Panchayat organizes various training centre for rural youth to generate employment.
14. The Panchayat opens PCOs, Cyber cafes etc to develop modern telecommunication and information technology services in the village.
15. The Panchayat promotes local industries and art. (Rao et al, 2010)

## II. CONCLUSION

The 73rd Amendment Act 1992 gives constitutional status to the Panchayati Raj Institution. The importance of the Panchayati Raj Institutions is to take democracy at the grass-roots level. It is the backbone of India's planning model because it ensures people participation. Peoples have their rights to manage their own affairs because they better know what is best for them. The Poverty Alleviation Programmes are formed by the Government but it is implemented at the ground level by the Panchayati Raj Institutions. The Panchayati Raj Institution is a basic institution which transfers India into a developed India.

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