

# Study of Panchayati Raj in Independent India

Amit Kr Prasad<sup>1\*</sup> Dr. Rafat Afroz Khan<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Research Scholar, Department of Political Science, Sri Satya Sai University of Technology & Medical Sciences, Sehore, M.P.

<sup>2</sup> Research Guide, Department of Political Science, Sri Satya Sai University of Technology & Medical Sciences, Sehore, M.P.

**Abstract – The Panchayati Raj has been seen to be one of the main tools for catapulting women into active leadership in the decision-making phase in the administration of local authorities. Women's presence in local councils has brought numerous positive developments and has certainly boosted democracy at the grassroots level. In the Indian scenario, for women, who make up fifty per cent of the population, the local government, especially the administration at the traditional village level panchayats, was almost out of bounds. For decades, the voice of women in the decision-making phase of the municipal bodies was almost negligible or null. This paper reflect study of Panchayati Raj in Independent India**

**Key Words – Administration, Women, Village, Mechanism, Independence**

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## I. INTRODUCTION:

After independence, the role of reinforcing the panchayati raj regime fell to the Indian government. It was clear that in order to improve democracy, India, a nation of villages, had to reinforce village panchayats. Mahatma Gandhi, who believed deeply in Gram Sara, proposed the transition of power to the rural masses. According to him, to become self-sufficient, the villages should rule themselves through elected panchayats. This was strongly opposed by Mahatma Gandhi and called for urgent attention. The panchayat thus takes its place in the Directive Values of State Policy. Article 40 of the Directive Principles of State Policy states that 'States shall take measures to coordinate and endow village panchayats with the rights and powers which may be required to allow them to act as self-governing units.' The Constitutionists have failed to reinforce grassroots democracy because the Directive Concept of Public Policy is not constitutionally binding on states.

Through the Cooperative Development Programme in 1952 and the National Extension Service in 1953, the first coordinated attempt was made to resolve the question of rural India.

The programme was focused on a holistic approach to the diverse facets of rural development. The aims were to encourage self-help and self-reliance among rural people and to create a mechanism of integrated social, economic and cultural transition in order to

transform the villagers' social and political lives. The Neighborhood Software for Growth has been initiated in designated blocks. The programme was focused on a holistic approach to the diverse facets of rural development. The programme called for the recruitment of Block Development Officers [BDO] and Village Level Staff [V.L.W]. This programme was meant to introduce democratic socio-economic development to the rural masses, but due to the absence of an appropriate instrument for the participation of citizens, it struggled to take off along the planned lines.

The Panchayat raj had to pass through different levels. The First Five Year Plan did not bring about constructive engagement and engagement of citizens in the processes of the Initiative, which involved the execution and monitoring of the Plan's formulation. Through the institutions of Block Development Officers, Assistant Development Officers, Village Level Staff, in addition to nominated members of village panchayats of that region and several other common organisations such as cooperative societies, the Second Five Year Plan attempted to cover the entire countryside with National Comprehensive Service Blocks. But the initiative failed to achieve decentralisation satisfactorily. The commissions were then set up by separate authorities to advise the Centre on various facets of decentralisation.

## II. THE BALKAN RAY MEHTA COMMITTEE (1957):

The Balkan Ray Mehta Committee reviewed the Cooperative Development Programs and the National Extension Service in 1957 and evaluated the degree to which the campaign had succeeded in taking advantage of local measures and developing structures to ensure stability in the process of improving the economic and social conditions of rural areas. The Committee considered that only when the group was engaged in the planning, decision-making and execution process would community growth be deep and lasting. The recommendations were as follows: -

Early formation of elected municipal bodies and the transition of appropriate services, influence and jurisdiction to them,

That the basic unit of democratic decentralisation was at the level of block/sanitary, because neither too large nor too small should be the area of expertise of the local body. The block was broad enough for administration effectiveness and economy, and small enough to preserve a sense of public participation. Such a body must not be limited by too much government or government department regulation. The agency must be elected for five years by indirect elections of the panchayats of the village. Its duties should include all facets of the development of agriculture, the promotion of local industry and other utilities, such as drinking water, road maintenance, etc., and the promotion of local industries.

Zillah Paris has a higher level agency that would play an advisory role,

The required political impetus was not established by the PRI system and failed to cater to the needs of rural growth. There are several explanations for such a result, including political and institutional reluctance at the state level to share power and wealth with local-level institutions, dominance by local elites over the large share of welfare system benefits, lack of local-level flexibility and lack of political will.

The first committee set up in 1957 to study the issues of political decentralisation in independent India was the Balwantrai Mehta Committee. The Committee was asked to report on projects for community development. Far-reaching proposals for political decentralisation and rural regeneration were made by the Commission.. It turned out that the curriculum for economic growth was inadequate because it struggled to invoke local action and that development would not be feasible in the absence of local initiative and local involvement. Five basic principles were set down by the commission.

1. From village to district level, there should be three-tier systems of local self-government

bodies, and these bodies should be tied together.

2. To encourage them to discharge their responsibility, there should be a true transition of power and responsibility to these bodies.
3. To allow them to fulfil their duties, appropriate resources should be transferred to these bodies.
4. Via these bodies, all health and educational schemes and services at all three stages should be channelled, and
5. Further devolution and disposal of authority and responsibility can be encouraged in the future by the three-tier structure. The committee envisaged three panchayat tier schemes known as Zillah Paris, Panchayat Semite and Gram Panchayat, and proposed promoting the involvement of people in voluntary work, promoting agriculture and animal husbandry, promoting the welfare of the weaker sections and through the panchayats of women.

The Committee has, for the first time, made proposals for the co-option of two women interested in caring for women and children. However, women were not to be elected, but were to be co-opted, as were the majority of the male members.

The Balwantrai Mehta committee's recommendations came into effect on 1 April 1958. On 2<sup>nd</sup> October 1959, Rajasthan was the first state to introduce it. By the mid-1960s, all areas of the world had entered the panchayat. More than 2, 17,300 village panchayats were created, covering more than 96 percent of the 5, 79,000 inhabited villages and 92 percent of the rural population. In rural India, there was excitement and people thought they had a say in the affairs concerning their everyday lives.

This is known as the promising days of India's Panchayati Raj Institutions. The Ministry of Community Development's report reported in 1964-65 that through Panchayati Raj institutions, younger and better leadership emerged (Mishra and Raj Sebastian).

Many states in the world have adopted the Balwantrai Mehta Committee's recommendations. The Panchayati Raj system existed in India until the mid-60s. But there was a decline in Panchayati Raj institutions after the mid-sixties, mostly due to bureaucratic trends to work in the country.

### III. ASHOK MEHTA COMMITTEE (1978):

In this background, the Ajanta government appointed Ashok Mehta as chairman of a committee in 1977 and was tasked with the task of researching the factors responsible for the weak performance of Panchayati Raj institutions. It was also asked to recommend measures to improve the institutions of the Panchayati Raj.

The committee recommended two Panchayati Raj tyre schemes consisting of district-level Zillah Parish ads and grass root-level Mandala Panchayats as opposed to the Balwantraji Mehta Committee's three-tier structure. The committee proposed institutional safeguards and further decentralisation of authority at all levels to the Panchayati Raj Institutions.

A notable characteristic of the study is that it proposed that these bodies hold regular elections and that political parties participate freely.

### IV. G.V.K. RAO COMMITTEE (1985):

To look again at different aspects of PRIs, the G.V.K. Rao Committee was named. The Committee was of the opinion that it was important to have an overall view of rural growth in which PRIs had to play a central role in coping with people's problems. The following was recommended: -

In order to become successful entities, PRIs need to be activated and equipped with all the resources needed.

The job of planning, execution and supervision of rural development programmes should be delegated to PRIs at district level and below.

The spinal cord of the rural development process should be the block development office,

### V. THE SALIENT FEATURES OF THE 73<sup>rd</sup> CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENT ACT:

The Act provided for gram sabra in each village to be created. It will be a body composed of all the adult representatives enrolled in the panchayat district as voters. Three are the three-tier panchayat system at the level of the village, the intermediate and the district. Smaller states with a population of fewer than 20 lakes would have the option of not getting intermediate panchayat levels.

Seats at all three tiers of panchayats shall be filled by direct voting. In addition, at the intermediate level, the chairman of the village panchayat can be made a member of the panchayat. MP, MLA, MLC, may also be a member of the intermediate and district level panchayat.

Seats for SCs and STs should be reserved in relation to their population in all panchayats and 1/3 of the total number of seats will be reserved for women. The offices of the president of the panchayat at all levels shall be reserved, in proportion to the province, for the good of the SCs and STs. Women are also reserved for one-third of the offices of chairperson of panchayats at all levels.

The state legislature shall be free to reserve the seats and office of chairperson in the panchayat in favour of members of the backward class. Panchayats shall have a uniform tenure of five years and elections for the creation of new bodies shall be concluded before the expiry of the term of office.

In the case of dissolution, the legislative procedure will be obligatory within six months. The reconstituted panchayat will serve a term of five years for the remainder of the century.

Unique roles will be allocated to the panchayats for the planning of economic development and social justice plans for the matters referred to in Schedule XI.

### VI. THE CONSTITUTION (SEVENTY-THIRD AMENDMENT) ACT, 1992, GOVERNMENT OF INDIA:

An effort to restructure the Panchayati Raj to meet the level of the grassroots is the 73rd Amendment Act. The bill granted the Panchayati Raj institutions statutory status for the first time and it became obligatory for all state governments to enact it. This reform resulted in uniformity in the panchayats' organisation, composition, powers and functions. It gave the Panchayati Raj an opportunity to foster social and economic growth and improve rural India's living conditions. The major critique of the Act is that these institutions are used as executing entities for development programmes and that the status of autonomous government institutions is not granted to them.

In response to opposition, the Act fulfilled the hope of constitutional status for Panchayati Raj institutions and new laws were enacted by state governments to enact it. It was described as the start of a quiet revolt. For the first time in the history of the Panchayati Raj institutions, this provision created opportunities for women to join local administration in significant numbers.

#### Reservation for women in PRIs in India

On 27 August 2009, the Union Cabinet of the Government of India approved a 50% quota for women in the PRIs (Panchayati Raj Institutions). Madhya Pradesh, Bihar, Uttarakhand and Himachal Pradesh are the Indian states which have already introduced 50 percent reservations for

women in the PRIs. The states of Andhra Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Kerala, Maharashtra, Orissa, Rajasthan and Tripura have also reserved 50 percent of their places for women as of 25 November 2011.

**Panchayati Raj (Rule of Village Committee)** The Panchayati Raj system is a three-tier system at the level of the Village, Talk and District in the state of elected bodies. It assures greater people's involvement and the more successful delivery of rural development programmes. At the district level, there will be a Grama Panchayat for a village or community of villages, a Talk level and the Zillah Panchayat.

India has a long tradition of panchayati raj, ranging from self-sufficient and self-governing village societies that have survived the rise and collapse of empires in the past to progressive third-tier government structures with constitutional protection.

## VII. THE THREE-TIER SYSTEM OF PANCHAYATI RAJ IN INDIA:

### Village Panchayat

The Village Panchayat is the lowest unit within the framework of the Panchayati Raj. For each village or a group of villages, there is a Panchayat if the population of these villages happens to be too small. The Panchayat is mostly composed of delegates chosen by the village residents.

Qualified for election to the Panchayat are only those people who are registered as voters and do not hold any professional office under the government. Persons accused of criminal offences by the court are excluded from the Panchayat election.

There is also provision for the co-option, if they do not get sufficient representation in the usual course, of two women and one member of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes.

As an entity, the Panchayat is accountable to the general village body known as Gram Sabah that meets at least twice a year. The Gram Panchayat shall send before the Gram Sabah its budget, previous year's accounts and annual administrative report. In addition, the consent of the village production plan, plans for taxes and development programmes must be obtained by the latter before the Panchayat enforces them.

### Panchayat Semite

The Semite Panchayat is the second one to reach the Panchayati Raj stage. The report of the Balkan Ray Mehta Committee envisaged the Semite as a single elected and energetic political institution to take care of all facets of rural development. The Semitic, according to the Committee, offers "an area

large enough for functions which the Village Panchayat cannot perform and yet small enough to attract the interest and services of residents."

Depending on location and population, a Semitic Panchayat typically consists of 20 to 60 villages. The total Semitic population is around 80,000, but the estimate is between 35,000 and 1, 00,000. The Panchayat Semitic usually consists of- (1) about twenty members elected by and from the Pinches of all the Panchayats falling in the block area; (2) two woman members and one member each of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes to be co-opted, given that otherwise they do not receive adequate representation; (3) two local citizens with public life and administration experience,.

The President of the Semitic Panchayat is the Pradhan, elected by an electoral college consisting of all the members of the Semitic Panchayat and all the Gram Panchayat Panchal falling within the area. In addition to the Pradhan, it also elects the Up-Pradhan. The Pradhan convenes and presides over the sessions of the Semitic Panchayat. In making preparations and conducting production projects, he leads the Panchayats.

### Zillah Paris had

At the top of the three-tier hierarchy of the Panchayati Raj system, the Zillah Paris had stalls. The Zillah Paris usually consisted of representatives of the Semitic Panchayat; all members of the State Legislature and Parliament representing part or all of the district; all district level officers of the departments of Medicine, Public Health, Public Works, Engineering, Agriculture, Veterinary, Education and other creation.

Unique inclusion of women, representatives of scheduled castes and scheduled tribes is also provided for, provided that they are not properly represented in the usual course. The Collector is now a member of the Paris Zillah that had.

The President of Zillah Paris is selected from among its founders. At Zillah Paris, there is a Chief Executive Officer. He is the deputy of the State Government of Zillah Paris. For different planning projects, subject matter experts or officers at district level are required in all states.

## VIII. PRESENT SCENARIO OF WOMEN IN PANCHAYATI RAJ

There are presently approximately 3 million elected members at all tiers of the Panchayat, 1/2 of which are women. More than 2.4 lakh Gram Panchayats, nearly 6,000 intermediate level levels and more than 500 district panchayats serve these representatives. The new panchayats comprise about 96 percent of the more than 5.8 lakh villages

in India and approximately 99.6 percent of the rural population, distributed across the length and breadth of the country. This is the best experiment in the history of mankind in the decentralisation of government.

The Constitution visualises panchayats as self-governing entities. However, much of the financial powers and authorities to be endowed to panchayats were left at the discretion of the state legislatures concerned, giving due consideration to the federal system of our polity. As a consequence, the powers and roles of PRIs differ from state to state.

These provisions merge the synergy of democratic and direct democracy and are supposed to contribute to an expansion and strengthening of democracy in India. Therefore, to gain legislative status, panchayats have moved from an entity within India's history.

Women's presence is 36.87 percent of the 28.18 lakh elected panchayat members in most other nations. Since the proposed constitutional reform, the number of female members would go up to over 14 lakh. With the exception of Nagaland, Meghalaya and Mizoram, the tribal regions of Assam and Tripura, and the hill areas of Manipur, the law would extend in all states and union territories, if provided for.

Under the 73rd Amendment, no less than one-third of the seats for the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes will be reserved for members of the Panchayats and the Chairperson's Office in the Panchayats, in proportion to their population.

The Government of India amended the Constitution in 2009 to allow for the allocation of seats in panchayats for women by 50 per cent.

Democratic decentralisation, rural self-government, and rural development were the key objectives of the Panchayati Raj. Rural India's socio-economic development was a major priority. Panchayati Raj was designed to enable people in rural areas to respond locally to their needs. It establishes the habit of living democratically. It reinforces Indian Democracy's foundations. Render self-governing and self-reliant units for villages. Gain a sense of self-confidence among the rural population. It serves as a framework of democratic education and training and, through the participation of the rural population, undertakes rural development. Promoting democratic living; delivering political education and training and rural growth through local initiatives to address local needs.

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## Corresponding Author

**Amit Kr Prasad\***

Research Scholar, Department of Political Science, Sri Satya Sai University of Technology & Medical Sciences, Sehore, M.P.