

Community Development and Panchayati Raj in India

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In India, the Panchayati Raj generally refers to the system introduced by constitutional amendment in 1992, although it is based upon the traditional Panchayat system of South Asia. The modern Panchayati Raj and its Gram Panchayats are not to be confused with the extra-constitutional Khap Panchayat (or Caste Panchayat) found in Northern India. The Panchayati Raj system was formalized in 1992, following a study conducted by a number of Indian committees on various ways of implementing more decentralized administration.

Mahatma Gandhi advocated Panchayati Raj as the foundation of India's political system, as a decentralized form of government in which each village would be responsible for its own affairs. The term for such a vision was Gram Swaraj ("village self-governance"). Instead, India developed a highly centralized form of government. However, this has been moderated by the delegation of several administrative functions to the local level, empowering elected gram Panchayats. There are significant differences between the traditional Panchayati Raj system, that was envisioned by Gandhi, and the system formalized in India in 1992.

It is common to note down that various committees related to the formation of Panchayati Raj include as Balwant Rai Mehta: established 1957; V.T. Krishnamachari: 1960; Takhatmal Jain Study Group; Mehta Committee: 1977; G.V.K. Rao Committee: 1985; Dr. L.M. Singhvi Committee: 1988 etc.

Without any shadow of doubt, Balwant Rai Mehta Committee, which was presided over by M. P. Balwant Rai Mehta, was primarily meant for analyzing the works of the National Extension Service was the most prominent one. Its main function was to lay down drastic steps to improve the working of the Panchayati Raj. The recommendations propounded by NDC in June 1958 created a favorable environment for the establishment of Panchayati Raj Institutions throughout the country. The present committee favored the establishment of the planning of democratic

decentralization which, with the passage of time, took the shape of Panchayati Raj.

In the future course of time, all these phenomena will be responsible for the formation of the 3 tier system in the Indian Panchayati Raj System: at the village level, Gram Panchayat; Panchayat Samiti at the block level; and Zila Parishad at the district level.

There is no denying the fact that the Panchayati Raj System was the system to be first of all followed by Rajasthan on Oct.2, 1959. In this regard, the second stage was Andhra Pradesh, while Maharashtra is considered at number nine to follow these norms. The state governments were compelled to follow the same system because of passing the laws regarding the formation of Panchayats in different states. In the 1992 Amendment, there was the devolution of power and responsibilities pertaining to the Panchayats. The Panchayats were deprived of their rights regarding the preparation of economic planning and social laws as well as for the implementation of various powers in distinctive fields which were included in the eleventh schedule of the constitution.

The present amendment focuses attention and holds good for the three tier system of Panchayati Raj for all states having population more than two million. It was the fact that to regulate the panchayat elections after a regular interval of time in which there was also a provision for the reservation for SC, ST and women as well as to make recommendations pertaining to the financial powers of Panchayats and moreover, its function was also to contribute a district level development.

It has been seen that the Panchayats receive funding mainly through three different sources: through local body grants which is recommended by the Central Finance Commission; through the funding by state governments on the recommendation of the State Finance Commissions; and last, but not the least, funds for implementation of centrally sponsored schemes.

In this way, after going through different phases of Panchayati Raj in India till the passing of 73rd Amendment act 1992, we can safely aver that the present act was extended to Panchayats in the backward areas of eight states mainly Himachal Pradesh, Gujrat, Odisa, Madhya Pradesh, Rajashtan, and Andhra Pradesh that started on 24 december,1996, and currently the present Panchayati Raj System is working in all states except Mizoram and Meghalaya, and in all union territories except Delhi.

BLOCK LEVEL PANCHAYAT

A Panchayat Samiti (block panchayat) is a local government body at the tehsil level. This body works for the villages of the tehsil that together are called a "development block". The Panchayat Samiti is the link between the Gram Panchayat and the district administration. Just as the tehsil goes by other names in various parts of India, notably *mandal* and *taluka*, there are a number of variations in nomenclature for the block panchayat. For example, it is known as *Mandal Praja Parishad* in Andhra Pradesh *Taluka Panchayat* in Gujrat and Karnataka, and *Panchayat Samiti* in Maharashtra. In general, the block panchayat has the same form as the gram panchayat but at a higher level.

CONSTITUENCY

Membership in the block panchayat is mostly ex-officials, it is composed of: all of the *Sarpanches* (gram panchayat chairmen) in the Panchayat Samiti area, the MPs and MLAs of the area, the sub-district officer (SDO) of the subdivision, co-opt members (representatives of the SC/ST and women), associate members (a farmer from the area, a representative of the cooperative societies and one from marketing services), and some elected members.

The Panchayat Samiti is elected for a term of five years and is headed by a chairman and a deputy chairman.

DEPARTMENTS

The common departments in the Samiti are as follows:

- General Administration
- Finance
- Public Works
- Agriculture
- Health
- Education
- Social Welfare
- Information Technology

- Water Supply Department
- Animal Husbandry and others

There is an officer for every department. A government-appointed Block Development Officer (BDO) is the executive officer to the Samiti and the chief of its administration, and is responsible for his work to the CEO of ZP.

FUNCTIONS

- Implementation of schemes for the development of agriculture and infrastructure
- Establishment of primary health centres and primary schools
- Supply of drinking water, drainage and construction/repair of roads
- Development of a cottage and small-scale industries, and the opening of cooperative societies
- Establishment of youth organisations

DISTRICT LEVEL PANCHAYAT

The governing of the advance system at the district level in Panchayat Raj is also popularly known as Zila Parishad. The chief of administration is an officer of the IAS cadre.

FUNCTIONS

- Provide essential services and facilities to the rural population
- Supply improved seeds to farmers and inform them of new farming techniques
- Set up and run schools and libraries in rural areas
- Start primary health centers and hospitals in villages; start vaccination drives against epidemics
- Execute plans for the development of the scheduled castes and tribes; run ashram shalas for Adivasi children; set up free hostels for them
- Encourage entrepreneurs to start small-scale industries and implement rural employment schemes
- Construct bridges, roads and other public facilities and their maintenance

- Provide employment

SOURCES OF INCOME

- Taxes collected locally such as on water, place of pilgrimage, local *mandirs* (temples), and markets
- A fixed grant from the State Government in proportion to the land revenue and money for works and schemes assigned to the Parishad

VILLAGE LEVEL PANCHAYAT

A gram panchayat is a village level administrative body, with a Sarpanch as its elected head. The members of the gram panchayat are elected for a period of five years by the members of Gram Sabha.

RESERVATION FOR WOMEN IN PRIS IN INDIA

On August 27, 2009, the Union Cabinet of the Government of India approved 50% reservation for women in PRIs (Panchayati Raj Institutions). The Indian states Andhra Pradesh, Himmachal Pradesh, Odisha, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh Tripura, Rajasthan, Jharkhand, Karnataka, Bihar, Maharashtra, Chhattisgarh, Utrakhand, and Madhya Pradesh, and have implemented 50% reservation for women in PRIs. The majority of candidates in these Panchayats are women. Currently 100% of elected members in Kodassery Panchayat in Kerla are women.

The Community Development was executed in the country for about five years (1952-1957). Government appointed Balwantrai Mehta Committee in 1957 in order to evaluate the work of Community Development Programme. This Committee found that people participation was less and the results were discouraging. It was remarked that unless the people are helped to take the initiative in planning and implementation of their own programme, community development cannot be satisfactorily realized. With this basic thinking, Committee recommended three tier system of Panchayat Raj. It is basically democratic decentralization process. The involvement of village representative in the administrative set up at various levels like Village, Taluka and District was emphasized which includes:

- i) Village Panchayat,
- ii) Panchayat Samitiand
- iii) Zilla Parishad were included in Statutory Act, 1958.

These institutions form a three tier system of Panchayat Raj. It provided the formal machinery for people's representative working through functions of policy decision making, mobilizing rural people resources, taking the initiative in planning, implementing and evaluating official programmes. This has been achieved by way of decentralization process in implementing Panchayat Raj System.

Democratic Decentralization distributed the authority and powers to the different levels as Local Self-Government units in order to care their regional problem solving process with large participation of the people.

S. K. Dey (1905-1989) was India's first Union Cabinet minister for Cooperation and Panchyati Raj. Mr. Dey is remembered as the man who pioneered and steered community development in independent India. He firmly believed that democracy cannot be practiced by government servants and stressed that the fruits of democracy ought to reach every village.

Mr. Dey's vitality and commitment to develop grassroots democracy prompted Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru to hand over the reins of Rural Development in newly independent India to Mr. Dey. After Nehru's death, Mr. Dey resigned from the ministry and dedicated his time to build Panchayati Raj institutions in the country. As minister, his pet project was the Community Development Programme (1953) which would later form the basis of Community Development Blocks across the country. Mr. Dey's concept of community development was rooted in his belief that the community could help itself rather than looking "towards the government as Mai-Baap." Mr. Dey's model of community development is characterized by a three-pronged strategy-development of the area, coordinated administration and development of the individual and the community. The first Community Development Project was undertaken in Etawah U.P in 1948. During 1952, 55 such projects were taken up across the country. Taking their success into account, the Community Development Programme was scaled up to all blocks in the country.

In 1949, Mr. Dey designed the concept of an agro-industrial township for rural development. The thrust of this model was its focus on a combination of agriculture and industrial development. The township would be provided support in terms of goods and services by surrounding villages. It would be self-sufficient and function on the basis of cooperation. This model materialized as the "Mazdoori Manzil" project in 1950, in Niloheri, Haryana.

The project benefitted 7000 homeless refugees from Pakistan. Mr. Dey considered this model to be welfare state in action. Impressed with the model, Nehru termed it to be the "Mecca of Development" and called for the creation of many more Nilokheris across the country. Unfortunately, over the years, Nilokheri has been lost to obscurity and lacks even basic facilities such as health, water and education. S.K. Dey appears to have been influenced, on the one hand, by Rabindranath Tagore's Shantiniketan experiment for Rural Development and, on the other, by the Gandhian idea of Rural Construction which laid stress on self-sufficiency and manual labour. It could also be perceived as a Model of Rural Development based on a synthesis of Liberalism, Marxism and Gandhi-ism. Its emphasis on individual liberty seems to have been imbibed from Liberalism, stress on right and duty to work from Marxism and that of small scale cottage and village industries from Gandhi-ism.

Mr. Dey was a member of the Balwantrai Mehta Committee (1957) that was set up to study the Community Development Programme. The Committee assessed the extent to which the programme had succeeded in utilizing local initiatives and in creating institutions to ensure continuity in the process of improving economic and social conditions in rural areas.

The Committee held that community development would be deep and enduring only when the community was involved in the planning, decision-making and implementation process, thus making a case for a strong Panchayati Raj system. The Balwantrai Mehta Committee proposed a seminal developmental role for Panchayati Raj Institution in rural development and termed these as necessary for the success of community development and national extension programmes.

Mr. Dey attributed philosophical connotations to the Panchayati Raj, which he explained in detail in his book "Panchayat-i-Raj, a Synthesis." He elucidates that the Panchayati Raj was an important link between the individual and the world at large.

Mr. Dey visualized an intimate relationship between the Gram Sabha and the Lok Sabha and said that democracy was to flow from the Parliament to the Gram Sabha. Mr. Dey urged state governments to give priority to establishing PRIs in their respective states. By the 1960s, all states had legislated on PRIs and more than 17,300 Panchayats had come into being.

Mr. Dey also played an instrumental role in the institution of the National Development Council. Mr. Dey's has made a marked contribution to the field of development journalism by being the guiding force behind "Kuruksheetra", the monthly organ of the Ministry of Rural Development.

Mr. Dey was a rare blend of a philosopher and practitioner who played an important role in the nation-building process for more than four decades after Independence. His pioneering contribution to the concept and implementation of rural development and Panchayati Raj merits special attention from social scientists, administrators, political leaders and other stakeholders in the project for rural development and decentralized rural governance.

The introduction of panchayat raj system in various states represents a new beginning in the evolution of the local-self govt, institutions as agencies of nation building. Within the short life span of less than two decades, the panchayat raj institutions in Tamil Nadu, Rajasthan, Maharashtra, Gujarat and West Bengal have given a fairly good account of themselves in various functional spheres - economic, social, political and administrative - and are well on their way to strengthening their positions in the countryside. It is a decade since the new panchayat raj setup was ushered in and started in functioning at village level taluk level and Zilla levels in Karnataka.

An important reason behind this new framework of decentralisation is to develop more effective, popular participation in local affairs, including activities of the Central Govt, that are carried out locally. Such participation not only enhances the dignity of the individual and the sense of community at all levels, but also adds vitality to governmental programmes and provides a means for local control over them. It makes the programmes more responsive and better adapted to local needs. Moreover, through participation, members of the community may be induced to do more on their own initiative and to make a fuller contribution to government programmes.

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