

ORIGINAL ARTICLE



**EVOLUTION OF PANCHAYATI RAJ INSTITUTIONS
(PRIs) IN INDIA**

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ABSTRACT

This study mainly deals with the evolution of the PRIs and has a general view on the entire organisation or machinery of LSG in India. Fairly complex and elaborate administrative machinery was developed gradually to deal with manifold types of local conditions and requirements. The system of LSG administration; means the efficiency of local bodies, with differentiated spheres, structures and functions. The few observations which were made on the system in the remote past, as some of the legislation enacted in the recent years, especially in the sphere of PRIs, were inspired by the ideas which the leaders of free India borrowed from the that existed in early times.

KEYWORDS: Panchayati Raj Institutions, Local Self-Government, Amendments, Ur, Nagaram

1. INTRODUCTION:

In India, Local Self-Government (LSG) is popularly known as 'Panchayats'. This government of ancient India has undergone several changes and has been systemised in the modern period as 'PRIs'. It is an integral part of body politic of a country, recognised or created under law for the management of local affairs of a human settlement within specified geographical boundaries. It is an organised social entity with a feeling of oneness. It political terms, it is concerned with the governance of specific local area, constituting a political subdivision of nation, state or other major political unit.

In India, a three-tier system of local administration is followed, (1) Village Panchayat at the lowest level, (2) Panchayat Union at the intermediary level and (3) Zilla Parishad at the highest level constitute the three tiers of LSG. The present study is carried out with main objective: to study the evolution of PRIs in the country.

2. EVOLUTION OF PRIS:

The concept of LSG in ancient period was far more successful than it was in the days of British or even today. The foundation of LSG in India is classified into two major parts:

A. The foundation of the Classical Age of LSG explains Vedic and Chola's period (B.C. 3000 to AD. 1200).

B. The foundation of the Modern Age of LSG explains the British Period (1857 – 1947) and the Post – Independence Period (1947 – 1992).

2.1. The foundation of the Classical age of LSG:

2.1.1. Vedic Period:

During the Vedic period, there were three public bodies or assemblies, which were the real origin of LSG. The apparently representative characters, of these were (a) Sacrificial and Religious Congress (Vidatha), (b) Village Council of Elders (Samiti) and finally (c) Popular Assembly of Representatives of Village Council of Elders (Sabha). The first and the last two assemblies were respectively called as "Religious Congress" and "Republican Assemblies".

2.1.2. Chola's Period:

The system of village government was in full swing under the Chola than in the earlier age. In the Chola period, the life and functioning of rural institutions, the ultimate cells that sustained national existence, were clearly little affected by dynastic wars and the shifting of political power at the top. In this time, village assemblies were very popular, and had large level of pure autonomy. Emperor Prantaka I promulgated some of the rules. In view of making his administration more efficient, and with a real desire to allow his own people to have a share in the government, he gradually initiated them in them in the arduous responsibilities and cares thereof, as they were enormous, not to say multifarious, ceaseless, and exhausting. In this period, village assemblies were of two types distinguished by the names '*Ur*' and '*Sabha*'. The other kind local assemblies were the '*Nagaram*' confined to mercantile towns, and '*Nadu*'.

2.2. The foundation of the Modern LSG:

At the end of the eighteenth century, British administration was established in India. Modern LSG, which was an important historic step, had been taken in the same period. During this period, formally constituted institutions of the administration replaced them. Malaviya, (1956) remarked that, " It was most desirable, alike in the interests of decentralisation and in order to associated the people with local tasks of administration, than an attempt should be made to constitute and develop village Panchayats for administration of local village affairs and these villages republics had been the ruination of India, the author surprised that those who condemn, provincialism and communalism should come forward as champions of the village'

2.2.1. Pre – Independence Period:

2.2.1.1. Lord Mayo's Reform (1870):

In 1870, Lord Mayo introduced this resolution. Its aim was financial decentralisation of LSG.

2.2.1.2. Ripon Reform (1881):

Lord Ripon was rightly regarded as the father of modern LSG in India. The resolution aimed at introducing far-reaching municipal reforms and made self-government something real. According to Panikar (1936), "his reform of LSG laid the basis of local municipal self-government, which soon took firm root in India and became the ground work of democratic institutions in higher spheres". This resolution embodied the ideas and also answered all the objections that were raised by the bureaucracy of those days against any extension of the powers of local bodies and giving them democratic character. It was a comprehensive resolution and dealt with administrative areas, the constitutions of local bodies, their functions, finances and powers. It was laid down that local bodies be entrusted with adequate financial resources and frame their budget.

2.2.1.3. Recommendations of the Royal Commission (1909):

This commission was desired to constitute and develop village Panchayats for the administration of certain local affairs within the villages. It suggested that this system must, however, be gradually and cautiously worked. The headman of village, where one was recognised, should be ex-officio chairman of Panchayat; other members should be obtained by a system of informal election by the villagers. The Panchayat should be a small body of about five members, and only in exceptional circumstances different villages can be brought under the same panchayat. The functions of panchayat must be largely determined by local circumstances and experience.

2.2.1.4. Montagu – Chelmsford Report (1919):

This report proposed to Government of India, its direct attention to the development of the panchayat system in villages. The commission recognised that the prospect of successfully developing Panchayats depended very largely on local conditions, and that the functions and powers to be allotted to them must vary accordingly; but where the system proved a success it was contemplated that they might be endowed with civil and criminal jurisdiction in petty cases, some administrative powers as regards to sanitation and education, and permissive powers of imposing a local rate.

The major changes in LSG were made during the British India (major changes like election system, administration system (three-tier system), and local finance are applicable even applicable today). This LSG concluded that when all real power is taken away from old institutions, forms or authority will not keep them alive. Among the many

changes which India has witnessed with the advent of British rule the saddest changes is the virtual extinction of the old forms of self-government and disappearance of those ancient village committee of which India was the first home among all the countries of the earth.

2.3. Post – Independence Period:

2.3.1. Balwantry Metha Committee (1957):

This study team was appointed in January 1957 to study and report on Community Development projects and National Extension Service. This committee was mainly set up for securing the maximum possible economy and avoiding wastage owing to delays and inefficiency. It mainly recommended giving all the aspects of rural development work charges to democratic institutions or LSG in rural areas and central and state governments provided the sole authority for all those development programmes through the LSG. It suggested a free and fair election to help for the LSG throughout the country to elect the representatives and that there should be a provision for co-option of two women members, one member from the SC/ST. It had been asked to examine the rural development programme with special reference given to coordination between the central and the state government.

2.3.2. Ashok Metha Committee (1977):

Primary objectives of this committee were:

- (a) to find the different level (Central, State, Union Territories and LSG) drawbacks and defects.
- (b) to mobilise the local resources
- (c) to rectify the rural weaker section's problems.
- (d) to prepare a constitution for the mandatory election of PRIs.
- (e) decentralise the powers and responsibilities from central to state governments.

The **Major commendations** were suggested by this committee as follows:

- (a) it recommended the two-tier PRI system (District and Mandal Panchayat)
- (b) Clustering number of villages constituted Mandal panchayat. It covered 15,000 to 20,000 populations and it made necessary linkages between urban and rural areas.
- (c) Rural people must understand their powers and responsibilities in PRIs. It helps for better functioning of these institutions.
- (d) It suggested the strengthening and giving equal status for all over Indian states for increasing the financial resources in rural areas i.e., some selected taxation powers should be given to the PRIs.
- (e) it recommended that panchayat bodies should be protect and improve the education, social justice and economic status of weaker section in rural areas.

2.3.3. G.V.K. Rao Committee (1985):

In 1985, Central government appointed Dr. G.V.K. Rao committee for the rearrangement of rural administrative set up and rural area developments. It reaffirmed the principle of decentralisation and devolution of powers and responsibilities for local social development to the PRIs. It recommended some important points and as follows:

- (a) District Panchayat should be the unit of local social development and planning, monitoring and execution of these rural development plans.
- (b) In district level, state government should create the post of District Development Commissioner. He should invariably be superior to the Collector. He should be the authority of rural welfare and development programmes as well as Chief Executive Officer of the District Panchayats.
- (c) Election of PRI bodies should be conducted regularly and care should be taken not to substitute the staff for trivial reasons.

In 1987, these recommendations were implemented in Karnataka state. The state appointed District Chief Secretary in every district. Development programme functionaries from the district level were placed under its control and the idea of district budget was begun. District Chief or Collector was in charge of regulatory functions.

2.3.4. Sixty – Fourth Amendment (1989):

Late Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi introduced this amendment in 1989. Main objective was the bill (a) to provide constitutional status to PRIs and (b) Mandatory election for these institutions. Some important points of the constitutional amendment are as follows:

- (a) All states will have uniform three-tier PRIs, which are village panchayat, panchayat union and district panchayat.
- (b) Reservation of seats for SC/ST has made in every panchayat in proportion to their population.
- (c) This amendment provided 30 per cent of seats to women candidate (including seats, reserved for SC/ST women)

2.3.5. Seventy – Third Constitutional Amendment (1992):

In 1992, this amendment was introduced and enforced with effect from 24th April, 1993. It has revolutionised and transformed, to a larger extent, the representative democracy into a participatory one.

Some of the salient features of this constitutional act are:

- (a) The constitution of Gram Sabha combined of all adult member or eligible voters of the village. It will help to assure face to face interaction and provide the chance to give voice to those living in about half a million villagers in India.
- (b) About 33 per cent of seats engaged for women candidates. Seats reserved for SC/ST on the basis of the population in their villages.
- (c) State government should compulsorily conduct elections for these institutions in every five years and it is uniform for all these institutions. This government should necessarily conduct elections within in six months from the period of termination.
- (d) This bill provided some important powers and responsibilities to these institutions i.e., to prepare plans for economic development and social justice in respect of matters listed in XIth schedule.
- (e) It suggested that central and state government should provide sufficient financial sources for the overall rural development activities and these governments should give the permission to collect some taxes through PRIs.

2.3.6. PESA Act of 1996 (Extension Act):

Previous laws did not automatically include the scheduled area (SC/ST), this act was introduced December 1996. Main objective of this law is to enable tribal self rule in their regions. It extended the provisions of PRIs to these regions. Most of the North Eastern states under 6th schedule areas (where autonomous councils exist) are not included by PESA, as these states have their own autonomous council for governance.

2.3.6.1. Key Features of the Model PESA Rules

- The Gram Panchayat shall be deemed to be the Executive Committee of the Gram Sabha. The Secretary of the Gram Panchayat will be deemed to be the Secretary of the Gram Sabha and the Gram Sabha will hold a meeting at least once in two months.
- A person who is a member of a Scheduled Tribe will be selected as chairperson for the meeting of the Gram Sabha for one year by consensus. In the case of non-consensus, amongst the members present, the oldest lady from the Scheduled Tribes would be the chairperson.
- The quorum of the meeting of the Gram Sabha will be one fifth of the total members. There shall be a separate quorum for women, which will be one third of the general quorum.

3. CONCLUSIONS:

Democratic decentralization means sharing the powers and responsibilities of the government with the public and to guarantee more political freedom. The role of the PRI in the development of rural areas is crucial. That is to say, it is closer to the people to plan for rural development, to contribute and mobilize resources. The electoral base of the local self government system is facing various pressures, stress and strains. Popular

enthusiasm and concerted collective action should therefore, emerge to meet the present challenges.

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