



DEMOCRATIC RURAL INSTITUTIONS: EFFICACY OF THE STAKEHOLDERS

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ABSTRACT :

As Gandhiji said "Panchayat Raj represents true democracy realized. We would regard the humblest and lowest Indian as being equally the ruler of India with the tallest in the land." As India being the largest Democracy in the world the need for the sustained development of Panchayat is very important for the socio-economic and political development of the country. In the process of sustained development, the efficacy of the stakeholders is very important as they play an indispensable part in the same. The need of the hour is to know whether the programmes and policies of the government are reaching the grass root level or not. Panchayat Raj system was advocated by Mahatma Gandhi 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. Panchayat Raj system is a process of good governance. Panchayats have been the backbone of Indian villages. In this space age, new socio-economic and political order, large sections of the people, especially the rural, domestic populations, are getting marginalized and cut off from the decision making process catering to the interests of the power elites. There is vast need to systematically rethink and remodel the concept of Good governance. In this process the stakeholders and government should be brought on one platform and it can be made possible with the help of media. Mass media has a vital role to play in educating the stakeholders of their rights, duties and responsibilities. Media and Publicity scheme is of tremendous help in taking the programmes to the rural population. With the burgeoning technological development, the day is not far where we can have "rurban" - rural areas with urban development. Here comes the curtain raiser for the stakeholders to work on efficacy.

KEYWORDS : Democratic, Panchayati Raj Institutions, Stakeholders.

INTRODUCTION

India's rural representative bodies - the panchayats were empowered and democratised with a series of constitutional reforms in 1993. The 73rd Amendment to the constitution formally recognized a third tier of government at the sub-state level. It in fact gave the state governments considerable autonomy to interpret and implement the constitutional reforms. Development of villages depends on the working of the Panchayat raj institutions. The Gandhian ideas of Gram Swaraj and Panchayat Raj system can become carriers for heralding the required social and political change by including all the stakeholders in the process of decision making and public policy formulation. As Gandhi said "Panchayat Raj represents true democracy realized. We would regard the humblest and lowest Indian as being equally the ruler of India with the tallest in the land.(Gandhi, M. K. & Vyas, H. M., 1962, p.71.). Several initiatives including reservation for women, conducting social audit, micro-planning at grass root level, have been taken to strengthen the Panchayati raj institutions by the state and central

government as well. But many of these initiatives are not reaching in true letter and spirit to their destinations.

Decentralization is advocated for those countries which cannot be supported by the centre alone because of its size, social, economic and political complexities. Many large countries which have diversities in terms of race, religion, region, and socio-economic chasm have opted for a federal form of government. In Indian polity the decentralization starts from village panchayat at the village level and extends up to the zillaparishad at the district level, and the states at the provincial level with the centre government at the apex. The Panchayats are expected to play a pivotal role in rural development in India. The second Five-year plan laid special emphasis on the role of Panchayats in rural development. Rural development includes measures to strengthen the democratic structure of society through the Panchayati Raj institutions. It also includes measures to improve the rural infrastructure, improve income of rural households and delivery systems pertaining to education, health and safety mechanisms.

Breakthrough in the rural development entirely builds upon an effective organization in the village which can assimilate all the people, including the weaker sections, to carry out the common programmes with the help of political and administrative assistance. In this context the role of Panchayats in the village development needs no emphasis. These imperative institutions have been reorganized with wider powers and financial resources not solely as institutions of political participation but also of social and economic development.

It is a government by itself and it is an agency of the state government at the root level. The administrators, elected representatives and local population participate in the process of development - both social and economic. The Panchayati Raj system is based on the following principles.

- There should be a three tier structure of local self-governing bodies from the village to district level, with an organic link from the lower to the higher ones.
- There should be a genuine transfer of power and responsibility to these bodies.
- Adequate financial resources should be transferred to these bodies to enable them in discharging their duties and responsibilities.
- All developmental programmes channelled at these levels should be funnelled through the particular bodies.
- The system evolved should be such as to facilitate further decentralization of power and responsibility in the future. (Dahama 1993, 41)

In fact, the development of the country reckons on the effective functioning of the Panchayat Raj and people's participation. It has an auxiliary part to play in the process of planning and usage of the resources productively. Over a period of time it is evolving as a catalytic agent for the integral development of rural people. It could provide individuals the opportunity to participate in the management of their own affairs and self-government. This implies to India where 80 percent of the population live in rural areas. Economic democracy can reach millions of people in rural areas through the local bodies.

Ghandhiji's views on Panchayat Raj System

Mahatma Gandhi reinforced his convictions with his tours all over the country that India can be a developed country if the villages are to be governed by the village Panchayats placed on the principle of "simple living and high thinking". These village republics which were self-contained and self-reliant where minimum standard of living could be accorded to all and maximum freedom and opportunity to develop to the possible extent. This lays the path of for the democracy to deepen. According to Mahatma centralization cannot be sustained as a system without adequate force (Harijan, 30th December 1939, Vol VII, p. 391). KhadhiGramodyag became the aim of Mahatma for the economic decentralization by which livelihood can be provided and also the development of Human resources toward enhancing their skill. According to Gandhi Panchayat was not only an appropriate medium for securing justice at no cost but also can avoid dependence on the government for the settlement of

mutual justice (Collected Works, May 1967, Vol XXV, p. 478.). According to Gandhi a perfect Democracy is based upon individual freedom as he is the architect of his own government.

Gandhi's Ideal village contain intelligent human beings, who will not live in dirt and darkness as animals. Men and women will be free and able to hold their own against anyone in the world. As Gandhiji said, "I know that the work (of shaping the ideal village) is as difficult as to make India an ideal country... But if one can produce one ideal village, he will have provided a pattern not only for the whole country but perhaps for the whole world. More than this a seeker may not aspire after." (Gandhi, M. K. & Vyas, H. M., 1962)

Gandhiji suggested that the institution of village republics both as institutions of parallel politics and as units of economic autonomy. Village is the lowest unit of a decentralized system; politically a village has to be small enough to permit everyone to participate directly in the decision-making process. It is the basic institution of participatory democracy. Gandhiji proposed the following rules for the guidance of village workers (Gandhi, M. K. & Prabhu, R. K., 2015).

- A Panchayat should in the first instance be elected by a public meeting called for the purpose by beat of drums;
- It should be recommended by the Tahsil Committee;
- Such Panchayat should have no criminal jurisdiction;
- It may try civil suits if the parties to them refer their disputes to the Panchayat;
- No one should be compelled to refer any matter to the Panchayat;
- No Panchayat should have any authority to impose fines, the only sanction behind its civil decrees being its moral authority, strict impartiality and the willing obedience of the parties concerned;
- There should be no social or other boycott for the time being;
- Every Panchayat will be expected to attend to the education of boys and girls in its village, sanitation, medical needs, maintenance and cleanliness of village wells or ponds, and up-liftment of and the daily wants of the vulnerable.

As Gandhi said, "Panchayat Raj represents true democracy realized. We would regard the humblest and the lowest Indian as being equally the ruler of India with the tallest in the land." (Gandhi, M. K. & Vyas, H. M., 1962). Gram Swaraj is a cherished dream for the empowerment of people and also for a participatory democracy. Alvin Toffler categorised Gandhi as the thinker of the future, for his is the voice of the age to come and not that which is fading and should fade away. (S. Radhakrishnan (ed), pp.1, 1968) A Utopian, for he, "sought to prepare us for life in a disarmed world. We must pull out of the world of strife and hatred and get ready to work on the basis of cooperation and harmony" (Jeevan Kumar & Anuradha Ramanna, 2011).

Role of Panchayat Raj System in Good Governance

Panchayat Raj system is a process of good governance. At this age of globalization, a rationale good governance at the grass root level to uplift the rural village by using information technology and giving better quality of life is very much needed. For which the democracy needs to be strengthened with good governance which is the most important factor for development. The nation can become strong and prosperous only when all villages are fixed from backwardness and poverty. Panchayats have been the backbone of Indian villages. Grass root development cannot be a mechanical development. It's a human process which requires hard work, dedication, responsiveness and accountability to make it a success. Panchayat raj institutions needs to be developed to improve good governance and delivery of services which involves redistribution of power, institution building and development process that improve accountability of the people. Development is looked upon as holistic in nature, which creates an environment to foster a long, healthy, creative life among people and make the governance process locally relevant, democratic, participative and responsive.

In this space age, new socio-economic and political order, large sections of the people, especially the rural, domestic populations, are getting marginalized and cut off from the decision making process catering to the interests of the power elites. The fertile land, forest land and coastal regions are being

annexed for the purpose of Special Economic Zones, industrial corridors and infrastructural projects. This is leaving the agricultural and rural population, landless and annihilating their traditional lands, which in turn is leading to internal displacements of this rural and indigenous population. The grassroots are not able to enjoying the permeating impact of development. Combined to this the rural population is migrating to the urban areas which are already overcrowded.

Recently India celebrated its 25th Panchayat Raj Diwas on 24th April, 2018, the present status needs an alleviation. Though many Puraskars (awards) are being awarded on this occasion, they alone don't suffice the efficient working of the Panchayat system. It is not followed by structured, scientific, consistent and sustained process of devolution which is leading to poverty and inequalities. The 12th plan failed to prioritise the role of Panchayati Raj institutions. The new reforms need to be implemented and human development outcomes to be visible. There is vast need to systematically rethink and remodel the concept of Good governance.

Working of Panchayat Raj Institutions for the Rural Development

For a very long time rural development was associated with the development of Agriculture and eradication of poverty. But with the changing times and with the development in Science and Technology the concept of rural development has undergone many changes. Rural development includes measures to strengthen the democratic structure of society through the Panchayat Raj institutions as well as measures to improve the rural infrastructure, improve income of rural households and delivery systems pertaining to education, health and safety mechanisms (Mishra, A.K., N. Akhtar & S. Tarika. 2011. "Role of the Panchayati Raj Institutions in Rural Development (An Analytical Study of Uttar Pradesh)." *Management Insight VII* (1): 44-53.). The main purpose of the rural development programme is to fulfil the basic needs such as food, shelter and clothing of the rural population. To satisfy these needs the Government of India has launched some developmental schemes such as Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), Indira AwasYojana, SampoornaGrameenRozgarYojana, PradhanMantri Gram SadakYojana, Integrated Child Development services, Development of Women and Children in Rural Areas (DWCRA) etc. The main purpose of these schemes is to reduce the gap between the rural and urban population and to lessen the imbalances and work on progressive development.

Telangana government established Sthreenidhi credit cooperative federation ltd., to supplement credit flow from banking sector to the SHGs and is a flagship programme of the government. It provides timely and affordable credit to the poor SHG members as a part of the overall strategy of SERP for poverty alleviation. Using mobile applications SHG members can borrow the credit from sthreenidhi. Technology is being widely used to work on the development of the technical skills of the population and specially to empower women at the grass root level.

Another major programme launched by the state government of Telangana is Gram Jyothi which is a continuation of ManaOoru-ManaPranalika. The main objective of this programme is to improve the service delivery to the people in core sectors through the strengthening of the Gram Panchayats by bringing together the efforts of various departments working at the Gram Panchayats by bringing together the efforts of various departments working at the Gram Panchayat level which are hitherto working independent of one another. The goal of GramaJyothi is bring in much desired accountability, transparency in the functioning of public institutions Working at Gram Panchayat level and make them responsive to the needs of the people by establishing.

The Panchayat raj department under the Telangana government has established the Society of Elimination of Rural Poverty to work on the eradication of rural poverty. It is also supporting the needy with different security schemes like Abhayastham, cattle insurance, Aasara pensions. To ignite the rural folk on the working of the SERP, an SERP Anthem is created for the stakeholders in their own language. Telanganagovernment enactment of the new panchayat raj Act can bring in mainly qualitative change in the Panchayat raj system in the state. New Panchayats are coming into existence from 2nd August, 2018, by which the total no goes up to 12,751. This is a remarkable number and the smallest division would ensure the working of the panchayat system in the best possible manner.

This is a time when Man is reaching beyond the Moon and basic grass root level population are still in ignorance. A time has come where human intelligence is being replaced by artificial intelligence and still the poverty levels are not changing, literacy rate is not increasing, basic amenities are not reachable to the people, transport system is not available in some of the remote places, health care needs are not up to the mark. These are the major concerns that the governments have to look into and work on war footing basis.

Role of Mass Media in Educating the Stakeholders on Good Governance

At the time of formation of Panchayat Raj ministry as a nodal ministry in the government of India for Panchayat, there was inadequate awareness among the various levels of governance and also general public. To create this awareness, Mass media has a vital role to play in the capacity building and empowering the training efforts as directed to Panchayat Raj Institutions and rural community. The plan scheme titled "Media and publicity" was approved in August, 2007 under Eleventh Five Year Plan. Media and Publicity scheme aspires at more effective and better communication through electronic and print media for more advocacy of Panchayat Raj and its programmes. Under this scheme conferences and meetings are also held with elected representatives, officers of Department of Panchayat Raj, experts, academicians, NGO'S etc. at regular intervals.

The electronic media including the public broadcasters - Doordarshan and All India Radio, private Television channels and print media can be catalysed for promotion and publicity of Panchayat Raj. Doordarshan and AIR has come out with programmes like "Grameen Bharat" which deal with the topics on health, sanitation, Agriculture, farming techniques etc. Apart from these they can also educate the population on the technological advancements that are taking place in the world, economic development, planning of finances, skill development etc. Few private channels are also coming up with this type of programmes that are conducive to the people at the grass root level. Proper viewership needs to be ensured for which publicity can be given through ministries portal for the programmes being telecasted on rural development. TV spots/Radio spots on various regional channels can be uploaded on the Ministries portal for easy reference of public.

Another important development in the recent past is the involvement of film fraternity in making movies which are contributing to the development of insight among the stakeholders in the rural development. A sign that has to be welcomed as this is the main medium that goes directly to the people and they take the words of the actors in those movies as path finders. This in turn can help the development of wisdom among the desired population. More and more such thematic films can be contributed for the film industry. Positive stories, Motivational and moral impetus from the mass media can conceptualise a Model village and Panchayat Raj Institution. When it comes to the positioning ourselves as part of the solution, by the stakeholders of Panchayat Raj, we can hope for the day is not far where we will be having "rurban" (Electronic Media and Panchayati Raj: A Synergetic Perspective by Aribam Ibomcha Sharma) - rural areas with Urban facilities.

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