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## PEOPLE'S PARTICIPATION IN LOCAL GOVERNANCE IN INDIA

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### Abstract:

*Decentralized governance can lead to more flexible, innovative and creative administrative set-up. In different nations or regions of the world, national governments are following decentralized governance as a strategy to strengthen accountability, political skills and national integration and bringing government closer to the people. In India majority of population resides in villages and a type of environment is required which make this large section involve in the process of rural development and democracy. Much attention should be given to the people's participation in the political and development process at grassroots level. It brings authorities closer to the people and increases transparency and accountability. There felt the need of sensitizing elected representatives at the local level. 73rd amendment has widened the democratic base of the Indian polity. The main theme of the paper is to highlight the people's participation, accountability and transparency at the grassroots level and also to emphasize the significance of 73rd Amendment act.*

### KEY WORDS:

people's participation, decentralization, development, transparency, accountability, governance etc.

### INTRODUCTION

Development is regarded as a process that requires democracy. Democratic decentralization is the process of developing functions and resources of state from the centre to the elected representatives at the lower level, so as to facilitate greater participation of people in governance. Decentralization is widely viewed as a way to make government more efficient and responsive to people's needs in the delivery of public services. Such people-centered grassroots level development process not only needs devolution of powers to the rural masses but also involves sensitizing them, particularly the leaders, towards activating them for their own common weal. A major drawback of Indian democracy has been that the participation of citizens in governance was more or less limited to periodic exercise or franchise to elected representatives to the centre and state government. The centralized planning launched soon after independence turned out to be redundant as there was much scope for leakage, corruption etc. Decentralized governance is a process which allows people's involvement in administration and development programmes. It remains significant for the realization of people-centered development and therefore, decentralized governance is a strategy for all people to enjoy equal rights, and is an instrument for building the capacity for economic development. The issue of people's participation at local governance assumed more importance with the introduction of 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act 1992. This Act has sought to give space to the weaker section and women in participation in the affairs of their own problems and development. It has also aimed at

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decentralizing the power and removing gender imbalance in government institutions.

### OBJECTIVES:

1. To examine the level of people's participation in democratic process at grassroots level.
2. To highlight the issue of people's participation, accountability and transparency in democratic process at grassroots level.
3. To emphasize the significance of 73rd Amendment Act in local governance.

### MATERIAL AND METHODS:

The study is based on secondary sources like Books, Magazines, Journals, internet etc. to know the facts and reality about the people's participation in local governance.

### PEOPLE'S PARTICIPATION: AN OVERVIEW

People's participation is not a new concept in the Indian setting. The scope and content of it, off course, have been different at different times of history or in different regions or communities. In the context of rural development however, the participation has a specific meaning. Participation is the 'introduction of a new set of people into the decision-making process with regard to resources allocations or resources distribution. By people we mean here those who have been victims of their exclusion from the developmental process and those who are likely to emerge as the beneficiaries of participation. The Western Political Scientists imply by participation all activities that support the system including those which may be temporally opposed to the ruling party or elite while any action of the masses to upset the 'apple cart' is 'mass action'. The first is democratic and the second is totalitarian in its potentially and hence has to be avoided.

The concept of people's participation emerged in 1980 with the context of increasing concern for the persistent (rural) poverty still found in different parts of the world. While, with regional variations, there was an overall improvement in the incidence of rural poverty from last some decades. In India majority of population (around two third of people) live in rural areas. Despite a respectable growth rate, self-sufficiency in food and official policy commitments to the eradication of poverty, India has not been able to reduce the absolute or relative number of rural people living in poverty. A study argued that the rural poor's lack of organization and their inability to gain access to existing benefits or to tilt decisions in their favor lay at the heart of India's rural poverty. An enabling environment is required to make this vulnerable section involve in the process of democracy and development. Much attention should be given to the people's participation in the political and development process at grassroots level. It brings authorities closer to the people and increases transparency and accountability. The central government focuses on regional and national matters and is not able to give its due attention towards local bodies. Local authorities are well known about their problems, decentralization enhances transparency and effectiveness in all service delivery. The presence of an active community increased demands for effective local governments. The individual participation celebrated by Jefferson and De Tocqueville is justified by the fundamental tenet of the republican government that all authority resides in the people; the people should rule. Edmund Burke once suggested that the well-oriented society must be considered a partnership 'a partnership in all sciences, a partnership in all arts, a partnership in every virtue, and in all perfection. The centre-state led development has been criticized because it could not become responsive, cost effective, and develop local capability and self reliance. With the failure of various state- led development programmes, attempts to improve people's participation in decision making and control of resources at the local level have been made. As a consequence, the local governance is now strengthening its base in the country with people-centered approach. So we can say that people's participation is essential for the overall development of rural masses.

### PEOPLE'S PARTICIPATION, ACCOUNTABILITY AND TRANSPARENCY IN LOCAL GOVERNANCE:

People's participation, Transparency and accountability are interconnected concepts and constitute elements of any anti-corruption framework. Transparency initiatives involve promoting access to information for a wide range of government process in several sectors. Participatory approaches aim at empowering beneficiaries. Both are more likely to be effective if combined with more traditional forms of accountability such as monitoring, control and oversight. People's participation, Transparency and accountability are often mentioned with a strong consensus to make effective decentralized governance.

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Transparency and accountability need each other and can be mutually reinforcing. Together they enable citizens to have a say about issues that matter to them and a chance to influence decision making and hold those making decisions to account.

Participation is chiefly concerned with increasing the role of citizens in choosing their local leaders and in telling these leaders what to do- in other words, providing inputs into local governance. Accountability constitutes other side of the process, it is the degree to which the local governments have to explain or justify what they have done or failed to do. Improved information about local needs and preferences is one of the theoretical advantages of decentralization, but there is no guarantee that leaders will actually act on these preferences unless they feel some sort of accountability to citizens. Local elections are the most common and powerful form of accountability, but other mechanism such as citizen councils can have limited influence. Accountability can be seen as the validation of participation. In that the test of whether attempts to increase participation prove successful is the extent to which people can use participation to hold a local government responsible for its action. Accountability is crucial caveat for development programmes. It can be defined as an explanation of one's action or responsibility. Accountability can be inter organizational, as between sub-branches of the government, intra-organizational, as between the supervisor and subordinates; and extra-organizational, as when an organization and its functionaries answer directly to customers or stakeholders.

Transparency can be classified in two ways: External and Internal transparency. External transparency helps in knowing, local needs, profile of the poor, and the prospective beneficiaries. Internal transparency provides information about the schemes and budget to the people. When there is less chance for corruption, wastage and leakage. Transparency is essential for good governance. More transparency in local governance should mean less scope for corruption. In that dishonest behavior would become more easily detectable, punishable and discouraged in future. The history of the industrialized countries indicates that this tend to be true in the longer term, but recent experience shows that this relationship is not necessarily true at all in the short run. In the former Soviet countries e.g. local governance institutions have become much more open to public scrutiny in the 1990's, but at the same time there can be little doubt that corruption at all levels has greatly increased. It is to be hoped that the local mechanisms of accountability discussed above will in tandem with greater probity at the national levels, but at best this will take time. The message for the international development community is to pass forward with as many of these accountability mechanisms as is feasible. A second type of leakage between transparency and corruption has been noted by Manor when he notes that in India, while greater transparency in local governance was not accompanied by increased corruption, it did lead to popular perceptions of greater public malfeasance, simply because citizens became more aware of what was going on. This pattern has surely repeated itself in many other locales. Over time, to the extent that accountability mechanisms begin to become effective and corruption begins to decline, the citizenry should appreciate the improvement.

Further, there is a need for more information for effective decentralized governance. Today, the flow of information in public affairs and service management has become an element of good governance. To access information in decentralized process ensure effective planning and implementation. It helps to invoke knowledge, promoting ideas, strengthening society and lives. It controls misuse and leakage of funds and brings efficiency in the development process. Simply information available is not sufficient to achieve transparency. Large amount of raw information in the public domain may breed opacity rather than transparency. Information should be managed and published so that it is relevant and accessible timely and accurate.

### SINIFICANCE OF 73RD AMENDMENT ACT 1992:

Although the Indian independence movement, under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi, had villages and their self-governing system at the centre, when the constitution of independence India was written they did not get a place in its main body; only a reference in the directive principles of state policy. Therefore, the state did not take both the Urban and rural local bodies seriously. The Indian states were functioning as a federation only at two levels- Union and States. As a result of the 73rd amendment, a new beginning has been made in the area of rural local governance in India.

The constitutional (73rd amendment) Act, 1992 has added a new part IX consisting of 16 Articles and the Eleventh Schedule to the constitution contains 29 functional items of the panchayats. The act has given a practical shape to Article 40 of the constitution. The article forms a part of the Directive Principles of state policy. The act gives a constitutional status to the panchayati raj institutions. It has bought them under the purview of the justifiable part of the constitution. In other words, the state governments are under constitutional obligation to adopt the new panchayati raj system in accordance with the provisions of the act. Consequently, neither the formation of panchayats nor the holding of elections at regular intervals

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depends on the will of the state government any more. 73rd amendment strengthens administrative federalism in order to facilitate and encourage delegation of administrative and financial powers from the states to the local bodies. These administrative powers and to discharge their responsibilities, are entirely derived from legislation that will have to be passed by the states.

The provision of the act can be grouped into two categories- compulsory and voluntary. The compulsory provisions of the act have to be included in the state laws creating the new panchayati raj system. The voluntary provision, on the other hand, may be included at the directions of the states. Thus the voluntary provision of the act ensures the right of the states to take local factors like geographical, politico-administrative and others, into consideration while adopting the new panchayati raj system. Now there are nearly 600 districts panchayats, about 6000 block panchayats at the intermediate level and 250,000 Gram panchayats in rural India.

To sum up we may say that the act is a significant landmark in the evolution of grassroots democratic institutions in the country. It transfers the representative democracy into participatory democracy. It provides greater opportunities to the local people to participate in the democratic process. It is a revolutionary concept to build democracy at the grassroots level in the country.

### Some important features of 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act:

- 1) Panchayats shall be constituted in every state at the village, intermediate and district levels.
- 2) While the elections in respect of all the members to Panchayats at the level will be direct, the election in respect of the post of the Chairman at the intermediate and district level will be indirect. The mode of election of Chairman to the village level has been left to the State Government to decide. All members including the chairperson shall have the right to vote.
- 3) Reservation of seats for SC/STs has been provided in proportion to their population at each level. Not less than one-third of the total membership has been reserved for women.
- 4) A uniform term of five years has been provided for the PRI's.
- 5) There shall be an Election Commission for the conduct of all elections to the panchayats consisting of a State Election Commissioner to be appointed by the State Government.
- 6) A State Finance Commission has to be constituted once in every five years to review the financial position of the Panchayats.

### CONCLUSION

Self governing rural local bodies are essential for overall development of the rural masses. There is the need of more and more participation of people in local governance. Local Government in India has not been a great success. The first area of concern is the wide gap between the aspirations of the people and the performance by the grassroots institutions. The second area of concern is the mismatch between the financial resources of the local bodies and the functions allotted to them or between expenditure responsibilities and their own resources available. The third area relates to weaknesses in the working of Gram Sabha.

The ethos of democracy can find real nourishment only when power reaches the grassroots level. For the ordinary citizen, it is local democracy, which can have real meaning and significance. In a vast country where large masses are still unlettered, village panchayats and participative democracy can do wonders. If the aim is to establish a democratic society then there should be transparency and accountability in local governance and should be given much chance of participation to the rural masses in local governance. In that sense, the most revolutionary measures in recent decades have been the 73rd Constitutional Amendments. It is hoping that with this Indian democracy could become a unique model for the rest of the world.

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