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## PANCHAYAT RAJ SYSTEM - NECESSITY OF CORDIAL RELATIONS BETWEEN PEOPLE'S REPRESENTATIVES AND OFFICIAL FUNCTIONARIES

Dr. Neelam Ramesh Reddy<sup>1</sup> and  
Dr. R.Raghurama Murthy<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Associate Professor in Political Science , SVGM Govt. Degree College, Kalyandurg, Andhra Pradesh (India).

<sup>2</sup> Associate Professor in Political Science , Govt. Degree College for Women, Ananthapuramu, Andhra Pradesh, (India).

### ABSTRACT:

*The success of a representative democracy very much depends on the coordination and cooperation of the elected representatives and official functionaries. The relationship between these two decides the democratic responsiveness and technical effectiveness of the governing system. Both the*

*bureaucrats and the people representatives have a key role in formulating the policies. Executive functions and policy making functions are the two facets of the same coin. The administrator and the elected representative interact and influence one another in the governing process. The introduction of Panchayat Raj system lead to the process of political and administrative decentralisation. The effectiveness of the functioning of grassroots of democracy depends on the interface between the elected representatives and the official functionaries. In this context this paper tries to examine the importance of the interaction of both people's representatives and the officials in the successful functioning of the panchayat raj institutions.*

**KEYWORDS:** *representative democracy, process of political and administrative decentralisation.*

### INTRODUCTION

"Administrative questions are not political questions. Although politics sets the task for administration, it should not be suffered to manipulate it's offices". – Woodrow Wilson.

The relationship between the administrator and the elected representative at the local government presents a clear division of labour. The elected representative formulates the policy and the official

implements it. The administrator has to adopt impartiality and neutrality in the process of discharging his responsibilities. He has to restrain himself from interfering in the process of finalising the policy. A conflict situation emerges when the administrators with lesser maturity and the elected representatives with little or no administrative experience try to dominate one another. The intensive influence of political factors at the local level makes it more difficult to have a smooth atmosphere in the functioning arena of both officials and non-officials.

At the most levels of Panchayat raj institutions, the relationship between the officials and people's representatives has become big impediment in the way of successful functioning of the system. The officials working at all the levels of hierarchy in the local administrative system are exhibiting an apathy towards the people's representatives. The officials are not ready to treat the elected representatives on an equal footing. The officials have nothing but contempt and resentment for the non-officials. The officials are of the opinion that the elected representatives are uneducated, illiterate,

inexperienced, untouchable, rude and lacking in good manners. Many officials opine that the elected representatives have no capacity or capabilities to handle the responsibilities mandated under the system of democratic decentralisation.

On the other hand the elected representatives at the local level mostly try to function by ignoring the constitutional and legal framework. They try to redeem the promises made to the people irrespective of the legality of their actions. The officials insist on adhering to rules and regulations but the representatives pressurise the officials to do the work dictated by them. The elected representatives strongly desire to identify their own party men as the beneficiaries by ignoring the most eligible people. The working of panchayat raj institutions on the lines of nepotism, favouritism, regional and caste jealousies create hellish experiences for the officials.

An examination of several acts enacted by various state governments reveals that the officials wield more power, including suspension and removal of elected representatives. Officials are empowered to control and inspect panchayat and even can suspend the execution of any resolution of the Gram Panchayat. In most of the states the executive officers and most of the staff of the local bodies are appointed, transferred and controlled by the state government. In such cases one can see a clear dominance of the officials. Some argue that there should be a say for the people's representatives in the appointment of officials. However the legal provisions that govern the relationship between the officials and elected representatives in panchayat raj institutions are not uniform throughout the country. In some states the balance tilts in favour of the elected representatives.

There is a need for initiating a true democratic process at the grassroots level. Strong political will and administrative support are the two most essential things for strengthening the democratic functioning of panchayat raj institutions. It is inevitable that people's representatives and the officials have to work together in a democratic setup. The relationship between officials and non-officials is influenced by several factors such as 1) control 2) Authority in whom it is vested 3) Ego satisfaction 4) Superiority and inferiority complex 5) Favouritism of both the officials and elected representatives. 6) Political intervention.

The constitutionalisation of the Panchayat Raj institutions by the 73<sup>rd</sup> Constitutional Amendment Act has made the elected representatives to see it as the transfer of power from the bureaucracy to the people's representative. Such a view made them more assertive of their role in the decision making process leading to more conflict between them and the officials.

Smooth functioning of a democratic setup depends on the cordial relations between the people's representatives and the officials. Hence both the players have to understand each other's problems and function within the limitations of the system. The differences in attitude are to be minimised to a greater extent so as to make way for the efficient functioning of the local bodies. Conflict reduction requires framing of rules and regulations that are mutually beneficial both to the officials and the people's representatives. The elected representatives are to be clearly convinced of their limitations and are made to realise that bureaucracy if handled carefully would contribute for the effective functioning of the Panchayat Raj Institutions.

In most of the states separate training programmes are conducted for the elected representatives and the officials on a vigorous scale. Printed material on specific guidelines with regard to functioning of the system is also supplied to the elected representatives. Some advocate that there should be joint training sessions for both elected representatives and officials. Such an exercise will lead to harmonious relationship between the officials and elected representatives. The elected representatives are also enlightened by way of taking them to the best panchayat in various parts of the country.

The presence of women elected representatives on a large scale due to the reservation provided by the constitution is also another major aspect that creates ripples between the officials and public representatives. In most of the cases where women are the elected representatives, it is their husbands or some other related persons who act as the defacto authority. Such an interference by the non-elected people creates lot of irritation among the officials. Such an impersonation by the related persons of

women elected representatives is to be curtailed on a serious note so as to mitigate the conflict between the officials and the public representatives.

Conflict between the public representatives and the officials will result in corruption and hamper the efficient functioning of the panchayat raj system. Civil society organisations and the media have a major role in ensuring transparency in the administration of panchayat raj institutions. Impartial media can prevent the unfair political interference of the elected representatives by highlighting the related issues. Officials are to be clearly instructed not to cross the legal jurisdiction in executing the decisions of the panchayat. The elected representatives are invariably local to the panchayat area and are better aware about the specific problems of the region than the officials who are new to the locality. Officials have to take into account the knowledge of the people's representatives while extending their cooperation in formulating the policies for the betterment of the panchayat.

The reforms in future at any level of the panchayat system have to incorporate a viable approach that establishes harmonious relationship between the officials and the elected representatives. The elected representatives have to repose faith in the officials and at any cost should not indulge in blackmailing them on various grounds. At the same time officials have to act like a guide and mentor to the elected representatives. Both the officials and the elected representatives must work together to realise the Gandhian dream of Gram Swaraj that leads to true independence at the bottom.

### CONCLUSION:

In the words of our late prime minister, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, "officials should bring in the experience of training and disciplined service. The non-officials should represent and bring in that popular urge and enthusiasm which give life to a movement. Both have to think and act in a dynamic way and develop initiative. The official has to develop the qualities of the popular leader; the peoples representatives have to develop the discipline and training of the official, so that they approximate to each other; and both should be guided by the ideal of disciplined service in a common cause".



**Dr. Neelam Ramesh Reddy**  
Associate Professor in Political Science , SVGM Govt. Degree College, Kalyandurg,  
Andhra Pradesh (India).



**Dr. R. Raghurama Murthy**  
Associate Professor in Political Science , Govt. Degree College for Women,  
Ananthapuramu, Andhra Pradesh, (India).