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## An Introduction of Panchayati Raj Institution in India Since Independence

Firoj Ansari

Research Scholar, Department of Political Science, AMU, Aligarh, India

**Abstract:**

*Panchayati Raj is a system of rural local self-government and its contribution could be visualized in short term, middle term and long term perspectives. It encourages micro level planning and development programmes by mobilizing and utilizing the locally available resource and this set up gives ample opportunities to the people to take part in the process of planning and implementation of the development programmes taking into account the felt needs of the people. This paper deals with existence of panchayati raj in India after Independence. In this paper we have mentioned rise and fall of panchayati raj and also mentioned different types of committee's recommendation.*

**Keywords:** Panchayati Raj, India, Committee

### 1. Introduction

Since ancient times, a number of systems of community-based management of local affairs had been evolved in India. These institutions, in most of the parts of the country, were known as 'panchayat' which literally means a council of five persons.

Panchayati Raj is a system of rural local self-government and its contribution could be visualized in short term, middle term and long term perspectives. It encourages micro level planning and development programmes by mobilizing and utilizing the locally available resource and this set up gives ample opportunities to the people to take part in the process of planning and implementation of the development programmes taking into account the felt needs of the people.

The objective of Panchayati Raj and Community Development were implementation of those developments into a reality. The organizational and administrative structure required for this purpose was to set up in right earnest. The village people were to be made conscious of the mess in which they had fallen and were to be made familiar with the ways and means of extricating themselves from this socio-economic slush. It was decided to organize the panchayats on a fresh footing and to protect them under a legal framework. Consequently they found their place in the Directive Principles of State Policy of Indian Constitution because it was keenly felt by the framers of the Constitution that political democracy can be meaningful only if the economic and social problems of 82% of Indian population were to be taken in an integrated way. In the beginning, however, when the Draft of the Constitution was prepared, panchayats were not mentioned in it. Since Gandhi was persistently of the opinion that village panchayats should form an integral part of Indian Constitution, this attention was drawn to the fact that there was no mention of village panchayats in the Draft Constitution. Commenting on this point Gandhiji observed that "It is certainly an omission calling for immediate attention, if our independence is to reflect the people's voice.

Several members of the Constituent Assembly took note of the omission and pressed for the provision of the village panchayats in the new constitution. However, some of members including B.R. Ambedkar, the Chairman of the Drafting Committee and Begum Aziza Rasul expressed their satisfaction on the exclusion of Panchayat from the Draft Constitution on the ground that no part of it represented in the ancient polity of India.<sup>3</sup> But several members of the Constitution Assembly organized an effective line of argument and a compromise was reached whereby the panchayats found a place in the Directive Principles in the Constitution.

The Constituent Assembly then started the discussion on Directive Principles, during the course of which an amendment was moved for increasing a provision regarding the panchayats that "the State Government shall take steps to organize village Panchayats and endow them with such powers and authority as may be necessary to enable them to function as units of self-government. Thus the Article 40, part IV of the Constitution of India, directed the states to establish village panchayats and develop them as unit of self-government this is one of the unique features of Indian Constitution. Simply framing of a democratic constitution cannot be adequate guarantee for guarding democracy. Although, these Directives are not enforceable by the courts of law, yet they have been enunciated to be fundamental to the government of the country. The ultimate purpose of these Directives is to guide the state to strive for the achievement of public welfare and prosperity. Besides this a number of commissions were set up with a view to reshape the rural India, naturally they paved way to the panchayat systems.

With the establishment of Planning Commission in March 1950, scientific planning started at large scale for economic and social progress, and for effecting agricultural improvements as the most urgent and primary needs of the country. Thus, a draft outline of the First Five Year Plan was published in 1951 and made proposal for a rural Extension service and manner in which it was to

be inaugurated. The concept of a Rural Extension service briefly referred in the Fiscal Commission Report was further developed by Grower Food Enquiry Committee (1952).

All these experiments had proved that the rural development was a continuous and indivisible process and they provided suggestive answers to many important questions as to how the rural development programme should be carried out effectively under the Five Year Plan. For re-shaping the village life, the Planning Commission conceived and outlined the programme of Community Development which was launched on October 2, 1952, under the Indo-U.S. Technical Cooperation Agreement.

## **2. Era of Planning or Five Year Plans**

With the inauguration of planning in India the role of panchayati raj received further emphasis. This was done mainly because it was considered desirable to have a rural base for successful planning.

The plan outlined a programme at Community Development and National Extension Service in which the Panchayats were to function as the most vital institution at the village level. The Community Development and National Extension Service programme was carried on in a block comprising of an area of about 100 villages. The objective of Community Development and National Extension Service Programme was to assist each village in planning and carrying out an integrated multipurpose plan for all round village development. Besides, it also aimed at improving existing village crafts industries and organizing new ones, and adult education programmes, improving families, housing conditions and providing programme for village women and youths. But the main aim of programme was to create a feeling of realization on the part of the villagers to develop themselves with their own help and initiative. The majority of the people were living in the villages had not seen the light of modernism and enlightenment. The cooperatives and the villager panchayats enjoying local support paved the way for the success of the programme. Community Development aimed at increase in the production and employment for which it needed the method of coordination, working between various agencies and build up people organization, in particular the cooperative and panchayats from undertaking the responsibly at social and economic development in the village.

## **3. Birth of the Panchayati Raj System or Institution in Independent India**

The credit of recommending panchayati raj in the form is goes to Balwanrai Mehta committee which published report in 1957. This committee appointed to examine the working of Community Development (1952) and National Extension Service (1953). These committee main recommendations were democratic decentralization and there should be three tier structures to village to the district with the block level serving as a link between the two. These recommendations of committee were accepted by the central government as well as majority of state government. The lead in this regard was provided by states of Rajasthan and Andhra Pradesh.

## **4. Rise of Panchayati Raj (1959-64)**

The States, Rajasthan and Andhra Pradesh were the first to adopt this system. On the occasion of lighting the lamp for introducing Panchayati Raj System in the county on 2<sup>nd</sup> October, 1959 at Nagaur in Rajasthan. But the Panchayat Raj Institution structure did not develop the requisite democratic momentum and failed to cater to the needs and rural development. There are various reasons for such an outcome which include political and bureaucratic resistance at the state level to share power and resources with local level institutions, domination of local elites over the major share of the benefits of welfare schemes, lack of capability at the local level and lack of political will.

## **5. Stagnation and Decline of Panchayati Raj (1965-1977)**

Unfortunately this enthusiasm could not be sustained as it did not develop the requisite democratic momentum and failed to cater to the needs of rural development. The system was faced with several problems. Another reason was the growing concern for improving the food grains production in the food-deficit country led to introduction of some new agricultural programmes. These were the Intensive Agricultural District Programme (1961) and Intensive Agriculture Areas Programme (1963). These programme were not entrusted to Panchayati Raj Institutions but were administered directly by the Agricultural Department with the support at the District Collector. Even the work under Panchayati Raj for promoting agricultural production as a part of Community Development Programme was withdrawn by the State Government Department at Agriculture. Thinking that development targets could be achieved faster through bureaucratic administration under ministerial direction in the agricultural sector, a trend began within the State Government to start withdrawing several other development functions along with their assigned personnel from the Panchayati Raj.

## **6. Ashok Mehta Committee**

Thus the appointment of Ashok Mehta Committee in 1977 marked a turning point in the growth of Panchayati Raj. The Committee submitted its report next year. It mentioned that Panchayati Raj had been weakened due to certain adverse factor. The most significant recommendation of the Committee was the two -tier Panchayat Raj System. According to this recommendation, the Zila Parishad at the district level was to be established as the first point of decentralization. It recommended the formation of Mandal Panchayats. A Mandal Panchayat was conceived to cover a group of villages, which would make necessary links with the system in developing focal points. There are various committees which worked on panchayati raj improvement like G.V.K. Committee (1985), Dantewala Committee (1978), L.M. Singhvi(1986), and so on.

### 7. Constitutional Provisions

The constitution (73<sup>rd</sup> amendment) Act, 1992 relating to panchayats containing articles 243 to 243-O. the main feature of the 73<sup>rd</sup> amendment are:

- A three-tier system of panchayati raj for all states having a population of over 20 lakhs.
- Panchayat elections to be held regularly every 5 years.
- Reservation for seats for the SC and ST and for woman.
- Constitution of state finance commission.
- Constitution of District Planning Committee to prepare development plans for the district as a whole.
- Establishment of State Election Commission and
- Establishment of Gram Sabha

### 8. Present Scenario

At present, there are about 3 million elected representatives at all levels of the Panchayat one-third of which are women. These numbers present more than 2.4 lakh Gram Panchayats, about 6,000 intermediate level tiers and more than 500 district panchayats spread over the length and breadth of the country. The new panchayats cover about 96 percent of India's more than 5.8 lakh villages and nearly 99.6 percent of rural population. This is the largest experiment in decentralization of governance in the history of humanity.

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