



ROLE OF PANCHYATI RAJ IN SOCIAL INCLUSION

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Panchayats have been the backbone of the Indian villages since the beginning of the recorded history. The genesis of the system of Panchayati Raj can be traced back to the vision of Mahatma Gandhi, who advocated the revival of the traditional Panchayats so that GramSwaraj which had been an integral part of the social system of India, could become a reality. The Panchayat was for him an instrument which would foster peoples' participation in the governance of the country. In independent India, the directive principals of state policy in Article 40 of the Constitution exhorted the states to take steps to organise village Panchayats and endow them with such powers and authority as may be necessary to enable them to function as units of self government. The three decades of nineteen fifties to nineteen eighties saw phases of revival governance with heavy social and political costs for the rural areas. The Patchy progress of development initiatives, lack of people's participation and support led to realization of the need to deepen democracy and develop inclusive and capable institutions of local governance.

Balwantrai Mehta Commission Report recommended a 'three-tier' system of Panchayati Raj institutions (PRIs), viz. the popularly elected village council (gram panchayat) as the village level basic unit. Block (block is the larger sub unit of a district) council (or panchayatsaphithi) at the Block level, and the district council (or the ZillaParishad) at the district level. Introduction of PRIs was hailed as one of the most important political initiatives in India

In 1977 government appointed a Committee with Ashok Mehta as chairman and was entrusted with the task of enquiring into the causes responsible for the poor performance of Panchayati Raj Institutions. It was also asked to suggest measures to strengthen Panchayati Raj Institutions. The committee suggested two tire system of Panchayati Raj consisting of ZillaParishads at the district level and MandalPanchayat at grass root level as against three tier system suggested by the Balwantrai Mehta Committee. The committee recommended

constitutional protection to the Panchayati Raj Institutions and further decentralization of power at all levels. The Ashok Mehta Committee (1977) Suggested:

- Reservation of seats for the weaker sections
- Two seats for women
- Adequate financial resources for the panchayats
- Requirement of Constitutional sanctions
- To extend people's participation in developmental activities.

The passing of the 73rd Amendment of the Constitution in December 1992 is considered by many as a milestone in the history of Social Inclusion. 73rd Amendment 1992 came into force to provide constitutional status to the Panchyati Raj Institutions.

The 73rd Amendment 1992 added a new Part IX to the constitution titled "The Panchayats" covering provisions from Article 243 to 243(O) and a new Eleventh Schedule covering 29 subjects within the functions of the Panchayats. It put emphasis on regular elections, financial resource generation, three- tier PRIs, more effective Gram Sabhas, reservation to SC, ST, and Women. Moreover, the system of reservations has been implemented in three tier Panchayati raj system.

The Core Features of the 73rd Amendment are

- To extend people's participation in developmental activities
- To provide 3-tier system of Panchayati Raj for all States having population of over 20 lakh.
- To hold Panchayat elections regularly every 5 years.
- To provide reservation of seats for SC, ST and women.
- To appoint State Finance Commission to make recommendations as regards the financial powers of the Panchayats.
- To constitute District Planning Committee to prepare draft development plan for the district as a whole.

The decision-making powers of panchayati raj bodies are extensive and the list includes farming, land reform, ecological restoration, rural industries etc. They make local development plans. The panchayati raj bodies are empowered to take decision on 29 clearly defined subjects, all concerning their day-day lives. Their role in the field of implementation is much more pronounced. Eleventh Schedule Article 243G of the Constitution endows the Panchayats with powers and responsibilities with respect to the implementation of schemes for economic development and social justice as may be entrusted to them by the Government including those in relation to the matters listed in the Eleventh Schedule

1. Agriculture including agricultural extension 2. Land improvement, reforms, consolidation and soil conservation 3. Minor irrigation, water management and watershed development 4. Animal husbandry, dairying and poultry 5. Fisheries 6. Social forestry and farm forestry 7. Minor forest produces 8. Small scale industries including processing industries 9. Khadi, village and cottage industries 10. Rural housing 11. Drinking water 12. Fuel and fodder 13. Roads, culverts, bridges, ferries, waterways 14. Rural electrification including distribution 15. Conventional sources of energy 16. Poverty alleviation programme 17. Education including primary and secondary schools 18. Technical training and vocational education 19. Adult and non-formal education 20. Libraries 21. Cultural affairs 22. Markets and fairs 23. Health and sanitation including public health centres and dispensaries 24. Family welfare 25. Women and child development 26. Social welfare including welfare of handicapped and mentally retarded 27. Welfare of the weaker sections, and in particular of the scheduled castes and the scheduled tribes 28. Public distribution system 29. Maintenance of community assets.

The Union Cabinet of the Government of India, on 27 August 2009, approved 50% reservation for women in PRIs (Panchayati Raj Institutions). The Indian states which have already implemented 50% reservation for women in PRIs are Madhya Pradesh, Bihar, Uttarakhand and Himachal Pradesh.

As of 25 November 2011, the states of Andhra Pradesh, Chhatisgarh, Jharkhand, Kerala, Maharashtra, Orissa, Rajasthan and Tripura also reserve 50% of their posts for women.

The whole ideology behind passing the 73rd amendment to Constitution was to create an effective third tier government and ensure social justice. Panchayat Institutions are the vehicles of political empowerment of people at the grass root level for shaping their own destiny. A vast majority of people are living at the grass root level in the rural and remote areas without any touch of modern day. A large section of such deprived people belong to Scheduled castes, Scheduled tribes and other Backward casts as also women in general at the grass root level.

Inclusion of the marginalized groups in Panchyati Raj has been a serious problem in Democratic decentralization. Inclusion in this context means the inclusion of the marginalized sections - women, Dalit and tribals- in Panchyati Raj governance. Women, Dalit and tribal have suffered social and economic marginalization for a long time and therefore are considered for affirmative action. Particularly in the rural setting, the socio-economic hierarchies are inter-related. Social Inclusion is a process. That is to say, inclusion has to be seen as a never-ending search to find better ways of responding to diversity. Inclusion is concerned with the identification and removal of barriers. Consequently, it

involves collecting, collating and evaluating information from a wide variety of sources in order to plan for improvements in policy and practice. It is about using evidence of various kinds to stimulate creativity and problem-solving. Social Inclusion is about the presence, participation and achievement of all in PRI Functioning. Social Inclusion involves a particular emphasis on those groups of society who may be at risk of marginalization, exclusion or underachievement. This indicates the moral responsibility to ensure that those groups that are statistically most “at risk” are carefully monitored, and that, where necessary, steps are taken to ensure their presence, participation and achievement in the PRI system.

Reservation of elected positions in PRIs has been supported on the grounds that it will equalize power differentials between historically privileged and under-privileged castes, as well as between men and women. Critics of this policy allege that efficiency and performance have suffered as a result of reservations.

With regard to ST Communities, the single biggest problem they are facing is the non-sensitive, on-humanitarian way in which central and state forest conservation Acts are being used to oust and displace tribal communities without adequate regard for the integral relationship between the vanvasis and the forests in which, or on the edge of which, they live. It is equally necessary for social inclusion that forest development agencies function under the aegis of the Panchayats in tribal areas in strict accord with the provision of PESA.

Across the board, tribal people (both male and female) participate less than any other group. Reservations for tribal people may be a useful way to counteract the exclusionary trend over the long term. However, over the short span of five years since reservations have been implemented no directly visible impact has resulted either in terms of participation rates or distribution of benefits.

Gender is a key factor in determining who’s included in gram panchayat activities. Women participate significantly less than men, and the social factors which limit women’s involvement in public affairs, are also reflected in the generally low levels of education and information that prevail among women. The study also noted that the quality of performance of the elected women representatives was largely dependent upon social factors like literacy, education and the tradition of social reform movements in the region. Patriarchal and feudal values constrained the political participation of women and though there were instances where reservations had failed to break the dominance of men over women, the new arrangement had helped in introducing a radical change in perceptions. Almost all the studies including those viewing them initially as proxy namesake members have noted the new recognition, identity, respect, confidence and aspiration levels of the women who have

entered panchayats. Even those who had initially entered panchayat elections due to persuasion/pressure of family members, acquired skills and confidence to perform their new role.

I would like to give the following Suggestions for the role of PRI in social inclusion.

Training is considered to be an integral part of any institution, which is involved in the development process. Training of SC,ST and women access to information is essentially urgent for realization of SC,ST and women's involvement in Panchayat politics and decision making. It will impart knowledge, skills and attitude to understand respective powers, functions and responsibilities. The majority of the PRI representatives were not trained in India. They are functioning without information on PRI Acts, Rule, Regulations and functions. The training for panchayat members should be organized in regular intervals at district/block level. The training of panchayat representatives and awareness campaign for gram sabha members is essential for social inclusion in PRI. In the context of social inclusion training centres develop special training modules and plans for reserved position representatives for better inclusion. Establishing a system to monitor the effect of these various measures on the level of inclusion of reserved position voters and representatives in activities associated with the gram panchayat.

The attitude of bureaucrats towards elected panchayat representatives needs to be changed as partners working for development. A successful training is dependent on the type of strategy and the nature and characteristics of the target group. In this view bureaucrats should be trained as per social inclusion philosophy.

The Gram Sabha is the heart of Panchayati Raj system. Gram Sabha belongs equally to everyone the rich and poor, male and female, educated and illiterate, irrespective of any caste or religion. They are all equal members to the gramsabha with equal rights and responsibilities sitting together, discussing issues and taking decisions. Some research finding shows that the SC, ST, and Women member's participations are very low. Gram sabha is the foundation of Social inclusion so members should be trained for functioning and participation in Gram Sabha Meeting. Empowerment of Gram Sabha means strengthening of the Panchayat Raj Institution (PRIs). Success or failure of this system depends upon the strength of the Gram Sabha.

Community participation is the stone of the concept of Social inclusion. The Balwant Rai Mehta committee remarked that Panchayati Raj would act as the representative of the village and ensure the development of the village as well as participation of villagers in developments activities. The representative of SC, ST, and Women participation should be in

the planning, implementation and monitoring of panchayati raj system. Community participation will be empower SC, ST, and Women to know and ask for their rights to education, health, shelter, food clothing etc. The state governments should invest in capacity building of the SC, ST and women Panchayats enabling them to participate in planning process at the Gram Panchayat and PanchayatSamitilevel. People have to assess their requirement and chalk out schemes and programmes according to their needs. They should be people s programmes and government has to participate in the programmes by facilitating the people to carry out their programmes on their own. Hence development works could be allowed to be done with the involvement of the people.

The PRIs today face the biggest challenge in the face of traditional social structure of the village. The emergence of new crop of leaders through reservations is finding problems of social acceptability. The vested interests are trying to create cleavages between the caste leaders and the elected leaders. In this view leadership quality should be develop and motivate in SC, ST, and Women PRI representative. The executive should give a positive support to this forum in order to check against any sabotage or clashes.

The functioning of PRIs could be successful only if the structure is strong and enduring, particularly at gram pancyayat level, which is the major source of people's power which would induce accountability in the system. The emergence of modern leadership, representation from weaker sections and citizen consciousness are also found to successfully battle the vested interest of traditional rural social structure. Once the political system attuned to people's needs and aspirations is built up from below, the objective of social inclusion in rural area will be realised with greater speed and reliability.

Decentralisation is not simply decentralisation of expenditure; it can include decentralisation of resource mobilisation. A major aspect of lack of SC, ST, and women's development has been the very inadequate infrastructural development. In this Context especially for the SC, ST, and Women specific development institutions which requires the intervention of both the State and Central Government. The simultaneous significance of decentralization, good-governance and coordination ensures SC, ST, and women's participation in institutional politics and decision making process. The legislative framework provided by the 73 rd Amendment could be made operational only through genuine political will and motivation to implement these laws. Traditionally Panchayati Raj has been looked at as an institution meant for providing services and facilities. But in the new context it is meant for not only services and facilities but also growth with equity.

Rural Development policies relating to every asset distribution and every allocation of resources should also be formulated from the SC, ST and women's perspective too. The protective discriminatory practices of the state build powerful arguments for SC, ST and women's rights enabling to bring a balance in social power equations. It would enable the SC, ST, and Women candidate take decisions and accept responsibilities for taking such decisions concerning themselves and empower SC, ST, and Women to fight against every form of discrimination.

Education especially elementary education must be made compulsory for ensuring equal participation of SC, ST and women in all walks of life. Training programmes on health education, small savings, developing skills etc., may be arranged by government and non-governmental organizations for SC, ST and women to realize their responsibilities and to develop character and personality. It would give economic power to the SC, ST, and Women and there by enable them to contribute their quota to the economic growth of the nation.

A long –term and lasting solution has to be sought through education. Mass awareness about social problems and programmes available for ameliorating them would strengthen grass-roots democracy and yield desired results. Till date people have developed an attitude that government would provide everything and people have to receive the same. Now the role has been reversed. People have to govern on the peoples programmes. Therefore the new system envisages a new task of building the capacity of the leaders and the people.

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