



## Panchayat and Rural Development in India

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**Abstract:** The concept of Panchayati Raj is unquestionably Indian in origin. Panchayati Raj bodies, which are genuine and effective democratic decentralized institutions, provide ample opportunities for a large number of rural people to take genuine and effective participation in the development and democratic decision-making process and to infuse in the minds of the rural people a spirit of self help, self dependence and self reliance and to obtain the experience in the art of local self-government. Panchayati Raj institutions have been playing an important role in order to monitor these rural development programmes. These institutions have been helpful

in identifying real beneficiaries in order to get maximum benefits out of these schemes. A number of hurdles and constraints and deficiencies are also responsible for failure of these rural development programmes. In this paper, an attempt has been made to examine various issues, aspects and dimensions related to Panchayati Raj Institutions in Ghaziabad district of Western Uttar Pradesh. It has been sought to analyze changes in the rural society and its impact on socio-economic transformation due to panchayat, political participation, and political mobilization etc. There are number of factors responsible for created hurdles in performing the role of PRIs. These are castism, groupism and factionalism, which resulting to bitter infightings, allegations and counter-allegations, mutual suspicions and rivalries etc.

ISSN : 2348-5612 © URR



### Introduction

Panchayati Raj, a synonym of democratic decentralization, was introduced in India in the late 1950s and early 1960s to restore to the erstwhile institution of Panchayat the pristine glory that it enjoyed in ancient India. It represents a political ideal and is reflected in the rural local-self government in its institutional form. The concept as such is not new to India. The plea for greater autonomy to the rural bodies received conceptual strength with the advent of Mahatma Gandhi on the national scene and his enunciation of the doctrine of the national development through autonomous rural organizations which he drive to model on the lines of Panchayat system as it prevailed in ancient India. He envisaged five-tier system of Village Panchayats, Taluka panchayats, District panchayats, Provincial panchayats, and All-India panchayats. The administrative system envisaged by him was that of a pyramid whose broad base was composed of numerous village communities of the country. The higher panchayats shall tender sound advice, give expert guidance and information supervise and co-ordinate the activities of the village panchayats with a view to increasing the efficiency of the administration and public service. But it would be the basic units that would dictate to the centre and not vice versa. In fact, the whole system would turn upside down, the village shall become the real and moving unit of administration. Jayaprakash Narayan, having his own concept of Panchayati Raj had no place for political parties. He opined that the success of them depended upon the extent to which political parties refrained from interfering with it and trying to convert it into their hand maiden, and using it as a jumping ground to climb power. "Self government through faction-fighting will not be self-government, but self-ruination." Nehru provided a very elaborate account of the Panchayats which worked ad



mirably in the ancient period. They had enjoyed vast powers, including executive and judicial. Cases brought before Panchayats were expeditiously decided. It has been clearly brought out by Radha Kamal Mukherji in his book entitled "History and Culture of Indian People" that in the Mauryan Empire the village community functioned like a self-governing corporation or republic giving to the people healthy chance to run their government and manage their own local concerns and affairs. Thus, the Indian polity in those days was broadly based on truly democratic institutions. Government's attempts to do developmental work through the institutions of Block Development Officers, in addition to nominated representatives of village Panchayats of that area and some other organizations like the cooperatives societies, failed miserably to accomplish decentralization to any satisfactory extent. Some state governments did try their best to decentralize powers but the overall situation did not improve. From 1957 to 1986, many committees including Balwantray Mehta (1957), K. Santhanam (1963), Ashok Mehta (1978), GVK Rao (1985) and L.M. Singhvi (1986) made a number of recommendations to the center. The resulting idea was introduced as a bill (64th Constitutional Amendment Bill) in the Lok Sabha in 1989 to achieve the above stated conflicting objectives. Though this bill could not be enacted, the idea was translated into the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act, 1992, which has brought about a new innovation in the grassroots politics in the country. It was hailed as a historic step in the empowerment of the people not only with a view to ensuring their more effective participation in the electoral process at the grassroots level, but also for entrusting them with a greater role in decision-making and developmental functions in matters of their immediate concern. For the first time PRIs have been admitted as the third stratum of our democracy and federal polity. The new law focused the attention of the nation on the political structures and process of rural India, their significance for the rural society and their participation in the operation of these structures. In the context of the changed scenario related to Panchayati Raj, it is essential to assess the impact of the above political innovations on the nature and pattern of grass roots politics in Western Uttar Pradesh. The major portion of population of Western Uttar Pradesh, as elsewhere in India, live in the villages and the working of panchayati raj institutions in this state has affected the life of the rural masses and they have realized a sense of participation in the democratic functioning of the government. It is true that a plethora of studies exist, regarding the various aspects of Panchayati Raj Institutions. But very few systematic studies have been conducted with specific reference to, rural factionalism, groupism, secret leadership, struggle and impact of reservation of seats for the women, SCs/STs and OBCs etc. It can fairly be assumed that this innovative and radical step must have influenced the process and pattern of grass roots politics.

Panchayati Raj or local self-government is an exercise in democratic decentralization of administrative authority. The system is based on the following principles.

- i. There should be a three-tier structure of local self-governing bodies from village to district level, with an organic link from the lower to the higher ones.
- ii. There should be a genuine transfer of power and responsibility to these bodies.
- iii. Adequate financial resource should be transferred to these bodies to enable them to discharge their responsibility.
- iv. All development programmes at these levels should be channelled through these bodies.



v. The system evolved should be such as to facilitate further decentralization of power and responsibility in the future. (Dahama 1993, 41)

The future of the country really depends upon effective Panchayati Raj and people's participation or co-operation. It is the only effective instrument which can put speed and substance in our planning process and ensure the most effective use of the country's resources for productivity. In that lies the future of both democracy and development of the economy as well as of the people. In the years to come, Panchayati Raj will be a catalytic agent of integrated development of tribal mass in rural areas.

### **What is Rural Development?**

Development is a broad concept which encompasses every aspect of human life. It is essentially an activity carried out by state involving policy formulation and execution on the part of the government for the benefit of society. Rural development, on the other hand, means an overall development of rural areas in social, economic, political and cultural spheres so that people could lead a pleasant life (Pandit and Kulkarni 2012, 160). It is a broad, inclusive term which takes in its consideration the socio-economic and political development of the rural areas. It includes measures to strengthen the democratic structure of society through the Panchayati 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, Akhtar & Tarika 2011, 45).

The rural development programmes propose to reduce the poverty and unemployment, to improve the health and educational status and to fulfil the basic needs such as food, shelter and clothing of the rural population (Panda and Majumder 2013, 37). For this to realize, Government of India launched some developmental schemes such as Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), Indira Awas Yojana (IAY), Sampoorna Grameen Rozgar Yojana (SGRY), Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana (PMGSY), Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS), Development of Women and Children in Rural Areas (DWCRA), etc. All these schemes are intended to lessen the gap between rural and urban population which would help ease imbalances and speed up the development process.

The term 'Rural Development' is of focal interest and is widely acclaimed in both the developed and the developing countries of the world. There is however no universally acceptable definition of rural development and the term is used in different ways and in vastly divergent contexts. As a concept, it connotes overall development of rural areas with a view to improve the quality of life of rural people. In this sense, it is a comprehensive and multi-dimensional concept and encompasses the development of agriculture and allied activities - village and cottage industries and crafts, socio-economic infrastructure, community services and facilities, and above all, the human resource in rural areas. As a phenomenon, it is the result of interactions between various physical, technological, economic, socio-cultural, and Institutional factors. As a strategy, it is designed to improve the economic and social well-being of a specific group of people, the rural poor. As a discipline, it is multidisciplinary in nature representing an intersection of agricultural, social, behavioural, engineering and management sciences (Singh 1995, 18).

### **Development Programmes by Department of Planning**

#### **District Decentralised Planning Fund**

The concept of Decentralised Planning had been introduced in the Kurung Kumey district very recently. The District Planning & Development Boards have full powers to efficiently and cost-effectively implement the district level schemes and also identify the areas and groups of people at the Grassroots level, which



h need special attention for equitable socio-economic growth. The District Planning & Development Boards are competent to select executing agencies for executing the works with decentralised funds at their own convenience and for works up to Rs. 20 lakhs, administrative approval will be accorded by these Boards. It is clarified that upper limit is applicable to each individual work and not to the total amount approved under a particular scheme/programme. The works up to Rs. 50 lakhs shall be sent to the Department of Planning for administrative approval. In consonance with the 73rd amendment to the Constitution, efforts are being made to transfer the fund, function and functionary to the Panchayati Raj Institutions by constituting District Planning Committees.

#### **MLA Local Area Development Scheme (MLALADS)**

This scheme enables each Member of Legislative Assembly (MLA) to undertake small developmental works in his/her constituency through the allocated funds of Rs. 2 crores per year. The works recommended under this scheme are conforming to the general pattern of programmes and projects being implemented by the local bodies. These works are sanctioned and implemented in the same manner as the other works. Whenever requires, technical and administrative sanctions are provided after following the departmental procedures applicable to the local bodies and other government departments. Only that works which can be completed in one or two years and lead to the creation of durable assets is executed where each individual work should not normally exceed Rs. 70 lakhs. In Hiya panchayat, the funds under this scheme are used in the construction of school buildings and toilets.

#### **MP Local Area Development Scheme (MPLADS)**

Under this scheme, funds amounting to Rs.5 crore per year are placed at the disposal of a Member of Parliament (Rajya Sabha and Lok Sabha) of a Parliamentary Constituency. The scheme is implemented on the guidelines received under the scheme from the Government of India. The funds are released for the works recommended by the concerned M.P. and the works are executed by the Line Departments/Implementing Agencies like Panchayati Raj, BDPOs,etc.

#### **Non-Lapsable Central Pool of Resources (NLCPR):**

In pursuance to the decision of the Government to earmark at least 10% of Gross Budgetary Support (GBS) of plan funds for the North Eastern States including Sikkim, the Ministry of Rural Development has been making allocation of plan funds under various rural development programmes. The decision to earmark 10% of Plan in Arunachal Pradesh Budget was to guarantee availability of funds to the NE States for implementation of vital pro-poor programmes. Further, it has also made mandatory to transfer the unutilized funds from the earmarked 10% plan budget, each year, to Non-Lapsable Central Pool of Resources (NLCPR) which is administered by the Ministry of Development of North Eastern Region (DONER).

#### **Development Programmes by District Rural Development Agency**

##### **Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act(MGNREGA)**

Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) is the renamed scheme of National Rural Employment Guarantee Act which was enacted by the Parliament as an Act No. 42 of 2005. The Act provides a guarantee for rural employment to households whose adult members volunteer to do un-skilled manual work not less than 100 days in a financial year in the accordance with the scheme under the act.

##### **Indira Awaas Yojana (IAY)**



Indira Awaas Yojana (IAY) is a centrally sponsored scheme funded on cost-sharing basis between the Government of India and State Government in the ratio of 75:25. Under this scheme Rs. 25, 000/- are provided for construction of a House, Kitchen, Smokeless Chulha and Toilet to a family living Below Poverty Line in rural areas in lump sum.

#### **Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana (PMGSY)**

Rural road connectivity is not only a key component of rural development by promoting access to economic and social services and there by generating increased agricultural incomes and productive employment opportunities in India, it is also a key ingredient to ensure sustainable poverty reduction.

The primary objective of the PMGSY is to provide connectivity, by way of an All-weather Road (with necessary culverts and cross-drainage structures, which is operable throughout the year), to the eligible unconnected Habitations in the rural areas, in such a way that all Unconnected Habitations with a population of 1000 persons and above are covered in three years (2000-2003) and all Unconnected Habitations with a population of 500 persons and above by the end of the Tenth Plan Period (2007). In respect of the Hill States (North-East, Sikkim, Himachal Pradesh, Jammu & Kashmir, Uttarakhand) and the Desert Areas (as identified in the Desert Development Programme) as well as the Tribal (Schedule V) areas, the objective would be to connect Habitations with a population of 250 persons and above.

#### **Swarnjayanti Gram Swarozgar Yojana (SGSY)**

The families living Below the Poverty Line belonging to rural areas are assisted under this programme— individually as well as in Groups (Self Help Group). Funds to be received under the scheme are shared by Centre and State Government in the ratio of 75:25 ratios. Assistance is provided for income generating activities. After 6 months of the formation of a Self Help Group Rs.10,000/- is provided as Revolving Fund and after completion of 2<sup>nd</sup> grading (one year) subsidy @ 50% subject to a maximum of Rs.125000/- is provided to a Self Help Group.

#### **Sampoorna Grameen Rozgar Yojana (SGRY)**

Two erstwhile schemes namely EAS & JRY were reviewed and re-casted as “Sampoorna Grameen Rozgar Yojana” (SGRY) in 2001. This is a centrally sponsored Wage Employment Scheme, Implementation of which will be done through Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs). The scheme has the objectives: (i) to provide additional wage employment in rural areas, (ii) to provide food security, (iii) to create durable community, social and economic infrastructure in rural areas, (iv) special emphasis to provide Wage Employment to: a. Women; b. Scheduled caste; c. Scheduled Tribes; and d. Parents of children withdrawn from hazardous occupations.

### **Conclusion**

The implementation of rural development programmes through the Panchayat Raj Institutions has brought a radical change in the socio-economic conditions of the rural tribal people in the study village. The implementation of rural development programmes has affected even the social and political affairs of the people. In the economic sphere, these programmes have shaped an improvement in economic position of the village. As a result, most of the tribal villagers have acquired an added income. Programmes like MGNREGA, SGRY, IAY (housing scheme) and power scheme such as Rajiv Gandhi Grameen Vidyuthikaran Yojana (RGGVY) have produced various gainful activities for poor tribal villagers to be placed above the



e poverty line. Furthermore, in the newly erected tribal houses electricity had been provided through RG VY which indicates a cumulative progression of infrastructural development in the study tribal village.

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