
Role Of Panchayati Raj Institutions In Rural Development: The Study Of A Village

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Abstract

Overall development of country is the main objective of Indian government since its independence. In the earlier Plans the main thrust for development was laid on Agriculture, Industry, Communication, Education, Health and Allied sectors but soon it was realised that the all-round development of the country is possible only through the development of rural India. Keeping this in view, Panchayati Raj Institutions have been introduced under the 73rd Amendment Act of the Constitution of India in 1992. Rural Development includes measures to strengthen the democratic structure of society through the Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs). It also includes measures to improve the rural infrastructure, improve income of rural households and delivery systems pertaining to education, health & safety mechanisms. Government of India has taken many steps to develop rural India and for this, Department of Rural Development has been setup under the control of Ministry of Rural Development. The Panchayats are expected to play an important role in rural development in India, particularly after independence. Plan documents of both the central and state governments and various committees have emphasised the importance of these bodies in the polity. Five-year plans, specially the second five-year plan, laid special emphasis on the role of Panchayats in rural developments. An attempt is made in this paper to study the role of Panchayati Raj Institutions in rural development in general.

Keywords: *Rural Development, Panchayati Raj, 73rd Amendment Act, Tribal Development.*

Introduction

The Panchayats are expected to play an important role in rural development in India, particularly after independence. In the Indian context rural development assumes greater significance as 72.22 per cent (2001 census) of its population still live in rural areas. Plan documents of both the central and state governments and various committees have emphasised the importance of these bodies in the politics. Five-year plans, specially the

second five-year plan, laid special emphasis on the role of Panchayats in rural developments. Second five- year plan envisaged a panchayat as responsible for village development keeping transformation of social and economic life of rural areas as its goal of development. It says that, the rural progress depends entirely on the existence of an active organisation in the village which can bring all the people, including the weaker sections, in to common programmes to be carried out with the assistance of administration. To achieve this objective the second Five year Plan entailed the Panchayats to perform civic, developmental, land management, land reform and judicial functions. Subsequent plans and policy pronouncements of national leader to emphasised the role of Panchayats in village development.

The role of Panchayati Raj institutions as instruments of rural reconstruction and development needs no emphasis. They have been reorganised with wider powers and financial resources not merely as institutions of political participation but institutions of social and economic development. Panchayati Raj has come to be associated with two broad images. First, it is a government by itself and second it is an agency of the state government. In the integrated exercise of planning for social and economic development, co-ordinate roles, the present set up is a three-tier representative structure of the government where the administrators, elected leaders and local population participate in the developmental effort. In fact the elected representatives play the key role in the decision making process, leaders are regarded as facilities of the process of development. Since the emphasis of rural development policies is bringing about people's participation in the development programmes, it is possible to achieve this through the leaders. The administrators are accepted to participate with missionary zeal in the life and development of the villages and these institutions are to be galvanised to become effective instruments of social and economic change.

Significance of the Study

The Panchayat Raj System is playing an important role in rural development. It has taken the responsibility of implementing various rural development programmes sponsored by both state and central governments. The study is crucial for evaluating the role of panchayat and the impact of the same on the development of study area.

Objectives of the Study

- i. To evaluate the rural development activities;

- ii. To identify problems in implementing rural development programmes; and
- iii. To give suggestions for the better implementation of policies and development.

Methodology

In the light of objectives of the study, a systematic research design is drawn. The relevant data for the study was collected through primary and secondary sources. Samples of 180 beneficiaries of various development schemes were taken to assess the impacts of the various development schemes/programmes on their lives. Research tools such as interview schedule and participant observation was used. The secondary sources comprised of official records of panchayat. Separate questionnaires were used for collection of information from gram panchayat members, and rural poor tribal people, who have taken assistance and other benefits under the jurisdiction of gram panchayat. A questionnaire was prepared which comprised questions on various aspects dealing with their social, economic and educational conditions.

How PRI s Evolve?

Rural development has been massively a government supported process rather the people- led process in India . To formulate and implement rural development programmes an appropriate institutional structure institutional structure is required. This need was met by the establishment of Panchayat Raj Institution (PRIs) in India. Further, the PRIs, being local self-governing bodies ensure, the opportunity for people's participation and involvement in the formulation and implementation of rural development programmes. Thus, the PRIs are entrusted with the task of promoting rural development in India. Since Independence greater emphasis has been laid on the social, economic and planning policy of our country for creating an appropriate rural, economic and social infrastructure and to promote an overall development. The planning policy of our county accorded the highest priority to agriculture and rural development. The measures envisaged from the first five-year plan had considerable bearing for the growth of rural economy. The first five-year plan laid down that "development of agriculture, based on the utilisation of man power resources of the countryside and the maximum use of local resources, holds a key to the rapid development of the country".

In the words of Committee on Plan Projects, "so long as we do not discover or create a representative and democratic institution which will

supply the local interest, supervision and care necessary to ensure that expenditure of money upon local objects conforms with the needs and wishes of the locality, invest it with never be able to evoke local interest and excite local initiative in the field of development” and the team recommended a three-tier model of Panchayat Raj to serve as instrument of rural development in India. Panchayats have been in existence for a long period. The present set-up clearly marks itself off from the past in respect of powers, functions and financial resources. The four main aspects of the present system are:

- (i) Democratization of the constitution and universal establishment of Panchayats.
- (ii) Transfer of more powers from the state to these bodies,
- (iii) Expansion of the scope of and transfer of more functions to the panchayats in regard to agriculture and allied activities, health and welfare and education
- (iv) Strengthening of the resource position of these bodies.

Rural development is generally conceived as a multi-sect oral activity which includes, besides agricultural development, rural industries, the establishment or improvement of social overhead facilities or infrastructure, such as schools, clinics, roads, communication, water supply, markets, welfare sources, improved nutrition, literacy, adult education etc. The primary objective of rural development is to enrich the quality of the rural masses, particularly the poorer and the weaker sections. The implementation of democratic decentralisation through the Panchayat Raj Institutions (PRIs) was meant to give an opportunity for local initiative and participation in the developmental activities.

True democracy cannot be worked from below by the people of every village.

In this light, The Constitution 73rd (Amendment) Act, 1992 has provided a new dimension to the concept of Panchayati Raj. In other words, the concept of people’s participation should be considered as an ideological commitment and, therefore, legislative and structural measures should be initiated to give legitimacy to people’s participation.

The Panchayati Raj Institutions are statutorily elected bodies at the village, Block and District levels with powers of local government. The primary objective of Panchayati Raj is to strengthen the base of democracy at the grass roots and to enable the people of each village to achieve intensive and continuous development in the interests of the entire population, irrespective of caste, class, and creed.

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 to 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 decentralisation of power and responsibility in the future.

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. 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.

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 realise, 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 populace 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.

Development Programmes in Panchayat

The Government of India and the state government is implementing a number of Centrally Sponsored Schemes (CSS) and state sponsored schemes related to rural development, health and family welfare, education, agriculture, women and child development, sanitation, housing, safe drinking water, irrigation, transport, social welfare, etc. throughout the panchayat. The main objectives of all these schemes are to generate employment, reduce poverty and economic inequality and improve the quality of life. Besides, some of these schemes aim at creation of basic infrastructure and assets essential for economic development in rural areas. The following categories of development programmes have been implemented in the study area for the last few years by various departments. In addition to the aforesaid functions, the Gram Panchayat is involved very much in the implementation of special economic programmes/schemes sponsored by both central and state governments.

District Decentralised Planning Fund

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 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. 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.

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 accordance with the scheme made under the Act.

Rural road connectivity is not only a key component of rural development by promoting access to economic and social services and thereby 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, Uttaranchal) 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 2nd grading (one year) subsidy @ 50% subject to a maximum of Rs.125000/- is provided to a Self Help Group.

Integrated Rural Development Programme (IRDP)

Implementation of the IRDP provided income generating assets and self-employment opportunities to BPL families in the village since the last few

years. Most of the families purchased assets belonging to the primary sector. These included pack animals (mules), cows and pigs. Some beneficiaries set up shops. There is not much scope for the secondary sector activities in the area. Majority of the beneficiaries was, of course, found happy with their new assets that have increased the flow of income to the family. This activity has created not only self-employment for the beneficiary but also wage employment opportunities for a few others.

Integrated Wastelands Management Programme (IWMP)

Having realised the gravity of the problem of natural resource degradation and the urgency of evolving a strategy for management of the land, various Centrally Sponsored Schemes of Watershed Programme has been taken up in the village. With the implementation of Watershed Programmes, the vast land which lies barren, are being reclaimed for afforestation, horticulture, cash crop cultivation thereby providing subsistence for the farmers and also various soil and moisture conservation measures are being incorporated in the programme. The programme being community based a sustained community action for operation and maintenance of assets have been created and further development of the potential of the natural resources in the watershed is encouraged. The poorer sections of the society are also benefited by enrolling themselves as part of the Self Help Group,

Public Distribution System (PDS) by Department of Civil Supplies

Almost all families have been issued ration cards in the village. It is observed that though the PDS shop is reserved for the people, they are not running the shop. All the people of the village have complained about the increase in the prices of ration items like kerosene, rice, and sugar. They also complained about the quantity of items, which have reduced drastically over a period of time. It is because of the frequent change of norms by the government as well as problem in weighing machine of the dealer/shopkeeper.

Besides, the government has been keen to bring development in the areas of education, health, economy, and political participation and so on through five-year plans implemented through various schemes and programmes. Primary and pre-primary schools in the village were established to bring the educational development among the villagers. Similarly, health sub-centre was also established and health functionaries periodically visited the village to extend health facilities. Thus, the approach of government towards development has been comprehensive and holistic in nature.

Overall Improvement of Infrastructural Facilities in the Village

Provision of basic infrastructure is a pre-condition for the success of rural development programme. Those who have easy access to infrastructural facilities benefit most and those who do not have adequate access to the infrastructure get by-passed in the process. Opinions of the sample beneficiaries regarding the accessibility, adequacy of different infrastructural facilities such as drinking water, sanitation, street light, education, health, quality of roads, transport, etc. were collected. Extent of people's satisfaction/dissatisfaction on the provision of these facilities was also ascertained during the study. The following table 2 shows the extent of satisfaction and dissatisfaction of beneficiaries about the infrastructure facilities in the study area.

Structural Change in the Study Area

It is quite interesting to see the likely change in the structure of tribal community as a result of poverty alleviation programmes which support the income and employment of the households in the lowest strata of the rural tribal society. For a long time these households were deprived of the benefits under various programmes which makes them deep-rooted in the rural economy. Now these poverty alleviation programmes have created favourable atmospheres for the tribal poor to improve their conditions. Another equally vital change that this study witnessed in the study area is that the poor people who never had any voice in the functioning of the village institutions are now taking active participation after these poverty alleviation or rural development programmes. This shows the confidence gained by the tribal poor in framing the programmes and policies basically meant for them. This change is predominantly due to the PRIs and their functioning.

Overall Observations

It is found that majority of the respondents were to some extent satisfied with the programmes as they had helped them to improve their economic condition at least marginally and to some extent employment. Majority of the sample felt quite satisfied with the change that has resulted in an increase in their income and employment.

To another question as to whether they would suggest any change in the scheme. Majority of the sample beneficiaries (74.44%) said no and those who pleaded for the change suggested that, the amount of assistance should be enhanced, and if possible it should be released in one installment.

Thus the rural development programmes especially the MGNREGA implemented through the Panchayati Raj Institutions in the selected tribal village have provided more employment opportunities for villagers. These programmes have also provided good social and economic positions for the rural people. The tribal people of the village are getting more facility of rural development programmes compare to the other nearby villages.

The rural development programmes have become a good mechanism for infrastructure development of the study area. The Gram Panchayat as an agency of state government is providing facilities like drinking water, sanitation, health services, school buildings, adult education, roads, bridges, street lights, etc. Thus, the assertion that Panchayati Raj Institution plays a decisive role in stirring the positions of the rural tribal people stands validated.

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

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