



Historical Review of Panchayati Raj Institutions in India: Its Evolution and Development after Independence.

Paryaz Ahmad Bhat & Irshad Ahmad Mantoo

Research Scholar Govt. Girls P.G. College Ujjain, (M.P.)

Email: paryaz123@gmail.com & Email: irshadmantoo@rediffmail.com

Abstract: *The paper makes an attempt to examine the historical review of Panchayati Raj Institutions, and its evolution and development after independence in India. The most fascinating factor stands that the people of India associated with the country with Panchayati Raj Institutions, which helped them to yield the fruits for decades in the name of rural development. The most important factor regarding the development of Panchayati Raj Institutions in India is the 73rd constitutional Amendment Act 1992, which gave the constitutional status to the Panchayati Raj Institutions of India.*

Keywords: Panchayati Raj, Gram Panchayats, Panchayat Samitis, Zila Parishad, Rural Development, 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act 1992, Committee, Democratic decentralization.

Introduction: The Panchayati Raj means a system of local self-government administered by a council or Panchayat duly elected in a democratic manner. It provides the administrative apparatus for implementation of the programs of rural development. The primary objective of Panchayati Raj is to evolve a system of democratic decentralization and devolution of powers, functions and authority to the rural people with a view to ensuring rapid

socio-economic progress and speedier and inexpensive justice.

Objectives of the study:

- The first objective is to study about the Panchayati Raj Institutions of India after independence.
- The second objective is to study its evolution, structure and development.
- The third objective is to analyze the historical impact of Panchayati Raj on Indian society.

Methodology of the study:

The present paper is based on the secondary data collected from the secondary source i.e. published literature of the subject concern.

Historical Review of the Evolution of Panchayati Raj Institutions in India after independence:

Balwant Rai Mehta Committee:

The setting up of Panchayati Raj in the states of the Indian union was done on the basis of the recommendations of the Balwant Rai Mehta Committee which was setup by the government of India in January

1957. The chairman of this committee was Balwant Rai Mehta. In recommending Panchayati Raj at the rural level, the Mehta committee and the decision-makers were influenced by the historical factors and the Directive Principles of state policy, mentioned in the constitution. However the committee submitted its report in November 1957 and recommended the establishment of the scheme of “democratic decentralisation” which ultimately came to be known as Panchayati Raj System. The specific recommendations made by the committee are:-

- Establishment of a three-tier Panchayati Raj system- Gram Panchayat at the village level, Panchayat Samiti at the block level and Zilla Parishad at the district level.
- The committee recommended direct elections of village Panchayats and indirect elections of Panchayat Samitis and Zila Parishads.
- All planning and development activities should be entrusted to these bodies.
- The Panchayat Samiti should be the executive body while the Zila Parishad should be the advisory, co-ordinating and supervisory body.
- The district collector should be the chairman of the Zila Parishad.
- There should be a genuine transfer of power and responsibility to these democratic bodies.
- Adequate resources should be transferred to these bodies to enable

them to discharge their functions and fulfil their responsibilities.

- A system should be evolved to effect further devolution of authority in future.

These recommendations of the committee were accepted by the National Development Council in January 1958. The council did not insist on a single rigid pattern and left it to the states to evolve their own patterns suitable to local conditions. But the basic principles and broad fundamentals should be identical throughout the country. Rajasthan was the first state to establish the Panchayati Raj. The scheme was inaugurated by the Prime Minister on Oct. 2, 1959, in Nagaur district. Rajasthan was followed by Andhra Pradesh, which also adopted the system in 1959. Therefore, most of the states adopted the system.

Ashok Mehta Committee:

In December 1977 the Janata Government appointed a committee on Panchayati Raj institutions under the chairmanship of Ashok Mehta. It submitted its report in August 1978 and made 132 recommendations to revive and strengthen the declining Panchayati Raj system in the country. Its main recommendations were:

- The three-tier system of Panchayati Raj should be replaced by the two-tier system, that is, Zila Parishad at the district level, and below it, the Mandal Panchayat consisting of a

group of villages with a total population of 15000 to 20000.

- A district should be the first point for decentralization under popular supervision below the state level.
- Zila Parishad should be the executive body and made responsible for planning at the district level.
- There should be an official participation of political parties at all levels of Panchayat elections.
- The Panchayati Raj institutions should have compulsory powers of taxation to mobilize their own financial resources.
- Seats for Sc's, and St's should be reserved on the basis of their population.

Due to the collapse of the Janata Government before the completion of its term, no action could be taken on the recommendation of Ashok Mehta Committee at the central level. However, the three states Karnataka, West Bengal and Andhra Pradesh took steps to revitalise the Panchayati Raj, keeping in view some of the recommendations of the Ashok Mehta Committee.

Besides this the other number of committees was appointed for the development of Panchayati Raj Institutions in India. For Example, GVK Rao Committee 1985, L.M. Singhvi Committee 1986, etc.

Structure of Panchayati Raj Institutions in India:

The Panchayati Raj system of India has a three-tier structure:-

- i. The village Panchayat.
- ii. The Panchayatsamitis.
- iii. The ZilaParishad.

The village Panchayat or Gram Panchayat functions at village level, there is a Panchayat for each village or a group of villages in case of small population. Members to village Panchayat are elected through voting in a general assembly of the village known as Gram Sabha. All adult members of village elect the council called Gram Panchayat. They also elect their village Pradhan. The village Panchayat has a secretary and a gram Gram Sewak to assist it in its functioning. The Panchayat also seeks to ensure a minimum standard of cultivation for raising agricultural production.

Panchayat Samiti is the main executive body and it operates at the block level. All the elected village Pradhans of the village Panchayats composing that block are the members of Panchayat Samiti. President and Vice-President of the Samiti are elected from among the members for a three year term.

The important of the Samiti are to prepare, executive and co-ordinate the programs of development at the block level. The Zila Parishad functions at the district level and is responsible for making, executing and co-ordinating the programs of rural development for the entire district. The chairman of Zila Parishad is elected from amongst its members. The members of the



Zila Parishad are the presidents of all the Panchayat Samitis in the district, the members of the legislative assembly from the district and the members of the parliament representing the district. The Parishad is providing assistance and guidance for carrying out its development programs by the district collector and other government officials of the district.

However, there were differences from one state to another with regard to the number of tiers, relative position of Panchayat and Parishad, their tenure, composition, function, and finance and so on.

73rd Amendment Act of 1992 - Significance of the act:

This act has added a new part-ix to the constitution of India. It is entitled as “the Panchayats” and consists of provisions from Articles 243 to 243-O. In addition, the act has also added a new Eleventh schedule to the constitution. This schedule contains 29 financial items of the Panchayats. It deals with Article 243-G. The act has given a practical shape to Article 40 of the constitution which says that “the state shall 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 act gives a constitutional status to the Panchayati Raj Institutions. It has brought them under the purview of the justifiable part of the constitution. In other words, the state governments are under constitutional obligation to adopt the new

Panchayati Raj system in accordance with the provisions of the act. Consequently, neither the formation of Panchayats nor the holding of elections at regular intervals depends on the will of the state government any more.

The provisions of the act can be grouped into two categories – compulsory and voluntary. The compulsory provisions of the act have to be included in the state laws creating the new Panchayati Raj system. The voluntary provisions, on the other hand, may be included at the discretion of the states. Thus the voluntary provisions of the act ensure the right of the states to take local factors like geographical, politico-administrative and others, into consideration while adopting the new Panchayati Raj system. The act is a significant landmark in the evolution of grass root democratic institutions in the country. It transfers the representative democracy into participatory democracy. It is a revolutionary concept to build democracy at the grass root level in the country.

Conclusion: To conclude the Panchayati Raj System, we can say that the Panchayati Raj System was established on the recommendations of Balwant Rai Mehta Committee as per the Directive Principles of the State Policy. It also becomes necessary here to mention here that the 73rd Amendment of Indian Constitution was really the great historical Amendment regarding the Panchayati Raj System. Through this Amendment the Panchayati Raj System became a proper system (a body



with soul). After the implementation of Panchayati Raj System in some States, it shows a rapid progress as well as developments especially in the socio-economic field. At last the development at rural/village level became possible, especially for far-flung areas. Nowadays the Central Government grant lot of funds under the Panchayat head, because the proper utilization of funds at rural level is only possible through the Local Self Government and a common person got benefited.

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