



Contents

- ❖ **Introduction**
- ❖ **Panchayati Raj Institutions in India: Historical Trajectories**
- ❖ **Community Development Programme**
- ❖ **Balwant Roy Mehta Committee**
- ❖ **Ashok Mehta Committee**
- ❖ **G. V. K. Rao Committee**
- ❖ **L. M. Singhvi Committee**
- ❖ **Sarkaria Commission (1988) and Other Committees on PRIs**
- ❖ **73rd Constitutional Amendment Act, 1992**
- ❖ **Salient Features of the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act**
- ❖ **The Provisions of Panchayats (Extension to the Scheduled Areas) Act, 1996**
- ❖ **Functioning of Panchayati Raj: Success and Failures**
- ❖ **Concluding Remarks**
- ❖ **Glossary**
- ❖ **Exercises**
- ❖ **Appendix – 1, Eleventh Schedule (Article 243 G, Added by the seventy third constitutional Amendment Act, 1992)**
- ❖ **References**
- ❖ **Useful Web-links**

Introduction

The basic feature of a democratic country is participation of the people in the process of governing. The Panchayati Raj Institutions (Hereafter *PRI*) in India have ensured that the people are not only governed by the central or the state/provincial government through their representatives but in the governance of their local affairs they, too, should have direct and maximum participation. And thus *PRI* have been truly categorised as the third tier of the government in India after the Central and the State government.

PRI is also known as the institutions of Local Self Government in India. It tries to provide the local communities greater say in the formulations and implementations of the policies that affect them. The ideal of local self-government is based on the Gandhian principle of Swaraj. For Gandhi, Swaraj was not just about the political freedom from the British. But, it was about individual's capacity to govern oneself. So, he was very critical of any centralised form of authority. In his model of government he envisioned a bottom up model, instead of top down model that is mostly practised by the modern state institutions. Gandhi believed in village republic and wanted it to have greatest say in the affairs that affect its inhabitants. Swaraj, for Gandhi should also include the empowerment of the masses and their maximum participation in the process of governance.

Indian state through different policies and programmes has tried to establish these institutions of local self-governments. The institutions of Local Self-governments have been given constitutional status, by Seventy Third Constitutional Amendment Act, 1992. And it is one of the major success stories of Indian democracy that these institutions of local self-government are functional in almost all parts of country. It has tremendous potential to transform rural India. Empowerment of the rural women is one of the remarkable achievements of the *PRIs*. It also plays an important role in the implementations of the development and welfare schemes of the central and the state governments like MNREGA etc.

PRIs in India have truly become the third tier of the government. It has tremendous potential to empower the rural population and to ensure the participation in the processes of governance. It can truly become the agent of 'deepening of democracy' in India. However, the *PRIs* are not free from the challenges. One the one hand its empowerment is obstructed by the bureaucratic and political control; on the other hand, dominant caste and landed sections of rural population, reassert their dominance through these institutions of Local Self Government. Therefore, despite these challenges, the success of *PRIs* is essential for the decentralisation of power and strengthening of democracy in India.

Panchayati Raj Institutions in India: Historical Trajectories

Historically, India is considered as a village republic, where the elders in the village used to solve the local problems through open discussion and debate. This strong tradition of debate proved to be the defining feature of Indian civilisation. But gradually its strength died down and in modern time it was during the colonial rule that focus was given to local self-government. It was to the credit of Mahatma Gandhi that a rejuvenated interest in the village republic developed among the Indian leaders during the nationalist struggle. The subject became a major issue of controversy during the framing of Indian constitution. Within the constituent assembly the 'modernists' had their way and defeated the Gandhi's idealistic notion of village republic and state became the main instrument of social, political and economic development. Nonetheless, Gandhians in the constituent assembly managed to secure a constitutional provision for the institutions of local self-government in the directive principles of state policy. Under article 40 of the Indian constitution there has been constitutional obligation on the Indian state to ensure the functioning of PRIs as the institution of local self-government. It says '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'.¹

Community Development Programme: Although, the government had made the provisions of Panchayati Raj as part of Directive Principles of State Policy it was suspicious of the functioning of this institution as an autonomous body and particularly they were apprehensive about ability of masses to mobilise the resources for not just govern themselves but also to use it for their developmental purposes. So in 1952 the government of India initiated a programme called Community Development Programme. In this programme instead of the masses it was the bureaucracy which was given the central role to play. And this was the reason that despite the political support of the government of India the programme could not yield the desired result.

Balwant Roy Mehta Committee: In 1957 government of India appointed a committee headed by Balwant Rai G Mehta to examine the working of Community Development Programme and to suggest measure for their improvement. Balwant Roy Mehta Committee submitted its report in 1957 and recommended for 'democratic decentralisation' with direct and full participation of the masses. This scheme of democratic decentralisation later came to be known as Panchayati Raj Institutions in India. The committee recommended three tier system of local self-government:

¹ P. M. Bakshi, *The Constitution of India*, Universal Law Publishing Co.: New Delhi, p. 103

- a. *Gram Panchayat* at the Village level;
- b. *Panchayat Samiti* at the intermediate or Block level;
- c. and, *Zila Parishad* at the District level.

The committee also suggested that these three tiers be linked together through a system of indirect election. That is the members of the village Panchayats should be directly elected by the people but the member of *Panchayat Samiti* and *Zila Parishad* should be indirectly elected. The committee also envisages a greater role for the *Panchayat Samiti* in designing and planning of developmental goal and *Zila Parishad* were expected to play only advisory role. It also recommended the adequate transfer of power and responsibility to these local bodies and it also believed that the system would be developed in such a way that it would facilitate further devolution and transfer of powers and responsibilities in future.

The committee observed that 'development cannot progress without responsibility and power. Community development can be real only when the community understands its problems; realises its responsibilities; exercises the necessary powers; through its chosen representatives and maintains a constant and intelligent vigilance on local administration'.² Thus, we find an echo of Gandhian philosophy in the recommendation of the Mehta committee report which was accepted by the National Development Council in 1958 and Rajasthan was the first state in India to establish Panchayats. On October 2, 1959 the birth anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi the first Prime Minister of India Jawahar Lal Nehru inaugurated the first Panchayats at Nagaur in Rajasthan. Nehru in his inaugural speech termed it as 'the most revolutionary and historical step in the context of new India'.³ By 1959 all the states in India had enacted Panchayati Raj Acts and Panchyats were formed in almost all part of the country.⁴ 'More than 2, 17, 300 village panchayts, covering over 96 percent of the 5, 79, 000 inhabited villages and 92 percent of the rural population had been established. On an average, a panchayat covered a population of about 2,400 in two to three villages. There were 4526 Panchayat Samities at the Block/Tehsil covering 88 percent of the blocks in the country. On an average a Panchayat Samiti covered about 48 Gram Panchayats. There were 330 Zila Parishad covering about 76 percent of the districts in the country and each Zila Parishad had on an average 13-14 Panchayat Samities and about 660 Gram Panchayats'.⁵ However, this triumphant mood with regard to Panchayats was on the decline by 1965 due to various reasons. These were - First, there was change in development priority and lack of fund;

² GOI, 1957. Committee on Plan Projects: Study team (Chairman: Balwantrai, G. Mehta), New Delhi: Planning Commission, cited in M Aslam, 2007. Panchayati Raj in India, Delhi: National Book Trust, pp. 18-19

³ Cited in Ibid, p. 21

⁴ Ibid

⁵ Kurukshetra, Vol. XXXVII No. 5, Feb, 1989, p. 33, cited in Aslam, p. 21

Second, lack of conceptual clarity about local self-government; third, the system adopted by the various states were not uniform. Despite the success of Green Revolution and Target Group Approach by the policy planners the poverty line particularly in the rural areas showed little sign of decline. This made the policy planners realise the importance of the community participation in the development projects and they began to look at the Panchayats as a possible and pragmatic through which rural development could be achieved.

Ashok Mehta Committee (Dec 1977): The Janata government, that was formed at the centre after the emergency, constituted to inquire into the working of *PRIs* in India and suggest the means and ways to strengthen it to function as the institution of decentralised planning and governance. The committee reposed the faith on local Panchayat bodies and recommended for its revival for overall growth in the country. On the functioning of Panchayat during 1959-77 it observed 'the story of Panchayati Raj has been a story of ups and downs. It seems to have passed through three phases – the phase of ascendancy (1959-64); the phase of stagnation (1965-69); and the phase of decline (1969-77).⁶ The committee submitted its report in 1978. Its most radical recommendation was introduction of two tier of local self-government – *Zila Parishad* at the District level and Mandal Panchayats comprising a number of village with a total populations of about 15000-20000 people. The committee recommended that the *Zila Parishad* be made responsible for planning at the district level and Mandal Panchayats would be responsible for its implementation and execution. Thus it envisaged a district to be made first point for decentralisation below the state level. It also recommended for the reservation of marginalised sections of society SCs, STs and Women on the basis of their population. The Ashoka Mehta committee also recommended for the appointment of a minister to look after the affairs of Panchayati Raj. To ensure the regular and smooth election of the Panchayats the committee recommended that a post of chief electoral officer should be created who will conduct and supervise election of the local bodies in consultation with the chief election commissioner. It also recommended the participation of the political parties at the all level of Panchayats election. However, the biggest drawback of the committee's recommendation was that it ignored the role of Gram Sabha. One of its members Sidharaj Dhadda in his note of dissent on the report of the committee, dated August 17, 1978 wrote –

I am strongly of the opinion that village must be the base, and the Gram Sabha an integral part of Panchayati Raj. Without this base not only Panchayati Raj or democratic decentralisation would have no meaning but democracy itself will

⁶ *Kurukshetra*, Feb 1989, p. 19 cited in Aslam, M, p. 24

*remain fragile. I am sorry that our committee has missed a great opportunity of putting democracy on a sure foundation.*⁷

Janata Government collapsed before the completion of the Ashok Mehta committee's term so its recommendations could not be acted upon by the central government. However, West Bengal, Karnataka, and Andhra Pradesh followed its recommendations but overall the receptions of the committee's recommendations were hardly encouraging. 'The chief minister's Conference in 1979 rejected the idea of two-tier system and favoured the continuation of the three-tier system'.⁸

G. V. K. Rao Committee: In 1985 Planning Commission of India constituted a *Committee on Administrative Arrangement for Rural Development and Poverty Alleviation Programmes* under the chairmanship of G. V. K. Rao. The term of reference for the committee besides other things was to study the role of Panchayati Raj System and to make appropriate recommendation with regards to its role in future administrative set up. The committee observed that 'states have been generally lukewarm to the process of democratic decentralisation. In most states the Panchayati Raj bodies have been allowed to languish without powers and resources. The committee is of the opinion that there should be a significant decentralisation at the District level'.⁹ The committee strongly recommended that Panchayats should be activated and their elections should be held regularly. It also recommended that all the power and resources should be given to these institutions to make them capable to handle people's problems. Like Ashok Mehta Committee it also recommended that the district should be the basic unit for policy making. It also recommended that PRIs at the district level and below should be assigned the role of planning, implementing and monitoring of rural development programmes.

L. M. Singhvi Committee: The Government of India set a new committee on 'Revitalisation of Panchayati Raj Institutions for Democracy and Development' in 1986 under the chairmanship of Dr. L. M. Singhvi. The committee felt that the concept of Panchayats was part of the Gandhian Philosophy of *Gram Swaraj* and *Purna Swaraj*. The committee for the first time considered Panchayats not merely as an instrument for the implementation of rural development Programmes but as basic units of local self-government in the country. The committee was of the opinion that:

It has been a fundamental error to regard Panchayati Raj Institutions primarily as convenient tools for administrative programmes and development projects. That

⁷ Cited in Aslam, footnotes 32, p. 34

⁸ Aslam, p. 27

⁹ Report of the Committee to Review the Existing Administrative Arrangements for Rural Development and Poverty Alleviation Programmes, Department of Rural Development, Ministry of Agriculture, Dec. 1985

error had the effect, in greater or lesser measure, of devaluing and downgrading the role of these institutions as units of self-government and relegating them to a secondary position, harming and hampering both democracy and development.¹⁰

The committee believed the existence and empowerment of Panchayats as basic units of self-government as part of the constitutional mandate and considered Gram Sabha as the 'embodiment of direct democracy'. The most important recommendation of the committee was about the constitutional recognition of the *PRIs*. The committee was of the opinion that *PRIs* should be recognised, protected and preserved by the inclusion of a new chapter in the constitution and it should be constitutionally proclaimed as the third tier of the government. It also recommended that elections of the Panchayats should be held regularly with interruptions. It also recommended constitution of Panchayati Raj Judicial Tribunal in every state to adjudicate controversies in relation to elections, suspensions, supersession and dissolutions and other matters related to the working of *PRIs* and its elected representatives. The committee also recommended that adequate financial resources should be provided to *PRIs* to function as the effective institution of governance. It also recommended constitution of Nyaya Panchayats for a cluster of villages.

Sarkaria Commission (1988) and Other Committees on *PRIs*: The Sarkaria Commission which was primarily concerned with the Centre-State relations also recommended for strengthening *PRIs* financially and functionally. One of its important recommendations was creation of Finance Commission at state level for devolution or transfer of resources to the *PRIs*. In 1988 a sub-committee of the consultative committee of the parliament under the chairmanship of P. K. Thungon also recommended for strengthening of *PRIs* and its Constitutional Recognition. Similarly, the Congress Party set up a committee in 1989 headed by V. N. Gadgil to make recommendations regarding revitalising the *PRIs*. 'The committee recommended a three-tier system of Panchayati Raj, a fixed term of 5 years and reservation for Scheduled Castes/Tribes and Women.¹¹ These recommendations became the basis for drafting the Constitutional Amendment Bill regarding *PRIs*.

73rd Constitutional Amendment Act, 1992

Following the recommendation of the L. M. Singhvi committee report Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi undertook the task of giving constitutional status to the *PRIs* and

¹⁰ 'Revitalisation of *PRIs* for democracy and development', L. M. Singhvi Committee: 1986 – Extract from Reports of various committees on *PRIs*, Kurukshetra, February 1989, p. 41, cited in Aslam p. 31-32

¹¹ Aslam, p. 32

introduced 64th constitutional amendment Bill in the Parliament in 1989. Though, the Lok Sabha passed the Bill by two-third majority it was struck down in the Rajya Sabha on October 15, 1989 by merely two votes on the ground that opposition thought that the Bill sought to strengthen centralisation in the federal system. V. P. Singh government also tried to strengthen the PRIs by introducing a Bill in Lok Sabha in September 1990 but the fall of the V. P. Government also resulted in the lapse of the Bill. Finally, it was to the credit of P. V. Narsimha Rao Government that the 73rd amendment to the constitution was enacted by the Parliament of India. They initiated the process in 1991 after including the necessary amendments and excluding the objectionable provisions of the Bill the Lok Sabha passed it on December 22, 1992 with near unanimity. Rajya Sabha passed it on December 23, 1992. The Bill got the assent from the president on April 20, 1993 after its ratification by the 17 state assemblies and the Constitutional Amendment Act 1993 came into effect from April 24, 1993. This amendment required all the States to amend their respective Panchayats legislations to make them conform to the central legislation and held Panchayats election by April 1995. All the states acted upon it and adopted their respective new Panchayat legislation by April 23, 1994.

Salient Features of the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act

73rd Constitutional Amendment Act gave practical shape to Article 40 of the constitution and brought it under the justifiable part of the Indian constitution. It has added a new chapter into the constitution entitled 'The Panchayats' and consists of provisions from 243 to 243 O. It has also added a new Eleventh schedule to the constitution which contains 29 subjects.¹² The State governments are now put under constitutional obligation to adopt and act upon the provisions of the new Act. Now the formation of Panchayats and holding their regular elections are no longer left on the discretion of the State governments. To make the PRIs uniform in the country it is mandatory for the state governments to implement the compulsory provisions of the act. However, State has been given some discretion to take into its considerations geographical, political and administrative factors while adopting new Panchayati Raj System.

- a. Gram Sabha:** Gram Sabha is the foundation of the PRIs in India. In the act Gram Sabha is defined as 'a body consisting of persons registered in the electoral rolls relating to a village comprised within the area of Panchayat at the village level'.¹³ Article 243 A of the constitution states that 'A Gram Sabha may exercise such power and perform such functions at the village level as the Legislature of the

¹² See the Appendix 1 for the subjects included in the Eleventh Schedule

¹³ Ibid, p. 228

may, by law, provide'.¹⁴ The success and failures of the PRIs in can also be determined by taking into account the role and functioning of the Gram Sabha in the area. An active and enlightened Gram Sabha is vital for the success of PRIs.

Figure 1, Gram Sabha Meeting

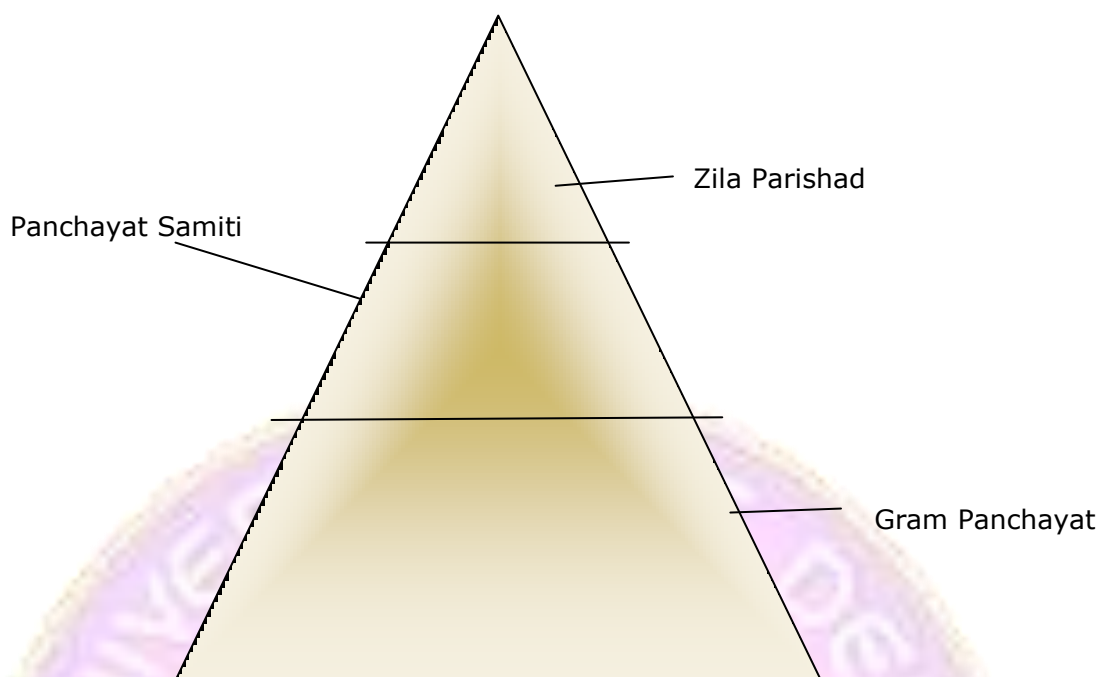


[Source: <http://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/tp-national/tp-tamilnadu/gram-sabha-meets-sensitise-voters-to-draft-electoral-rolls/article2590341.ece>]

- b. Three-tier system:** The act envisages a three-tier system of PRIs in every state of the country that is Panchayats at the village, intermediate and district level (Article 243 B). Thus it provides a uniform structure of PRIs across the country. Only those states with a population of less than twenty lakhs have been exempted from the constitution of the Panchayats at the intermediate level.

A Diagram of the Three Tiers of *PRIs* in India

¹⁴ P. M. Bakshi, p. 229



- c. Elections of Members and Chairpersons:** Act has made it clear that all the members of the Panchayats at the village, intermediate and district levels shall be directly elected by the people. The chairperson of the Panchayats at intermediate and district levels shall be elected indirectly by and from amongst the elected members themselves. However, Chairperson at the village level may be elected in such a manner as the State legislature may determine.
- d. Reservation of Seats:** The act also provides for the reservation of seats for Scheduled castes and Scheduled Tribes in Panchayats at every level in proportion to their population to the total number of population in the Panchayat area. Further, not less than one third of seats are reserved for Women (including number of seats reserved for the women belonging to Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribes). The act also provides one third reservation for women as chairpersons at all level of Panchayats. Similarly, the offices of the chairpersons at the all levels of Panchayats are reserved for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in proportion to their population in the Panchayat.
- e. Durations of Panchayats:** The duration of Panchayats at all levels is for a period of five years. However, it can be dissolved before the expiry of five years. If for any reason it is dissolved before the end of this period fresh election must be held within six months.

- f. Panchayat's Election:** The State government may make laws with respect to all the matters related to the election of Panchayats. However, the superintendence, direction and control of the elections of Panchayats are vested in the State Election Commission. It also prepares electoral rolls for the elections of Panchayats. The State Election Commissioner is appointed by the Governor and can be removed from the office in a manner and on the ground prescribed for the removal of a High Court Judge.
- g. Finance Commission:** In order to ensure that enough funds are available to Panchayats to initiate development activities 73rd Amendment Act provides for the constitution of a finance commission in each state by the Governor after every five years. The Finance Commission of the State is expected to suggest means and ways to distribute the net proceeds of the taxes, duties, tolls and fees levied by the state. It can also determine the taxes, duties, tolls and fees that may be assigned to Panchayats. The commission can also suggest on the grant-in-aid to the Panchayats from the consolidated fund of the state. Thus it is the responsibility of the State Finance Commissions to suggest the means and ways that shall ensure the sound financial conditions of the Panchayats.
- h. Responsibilities of the Panchayats:** The Act provides the powers and responsibilities to the Panchayats to formulate plans and policies on economic development, social justice and any other schemes on the subject listed in the eleventh schedule and ensure their implementation. Besides, the state legislature may entrust them such power and authority that may be necessary for them to function as basic units of self-government.

The Provisions of Panchayats (Extension to the Scheduled Areas) Act, 1996

Under the provisions of the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act the government of India passed legislation in 1996 to extend the jurisdiction of the act in the scheduled areas. The Provisions of the Panchayats (Extension to the Scheduled Areas) Act, [Also known as PESA] 1996, came into force on December 24th, 1996. This Act extended the provisions of the Panchayats in the tribal areas of the ten States namely Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand, Gujarat, Himachal Pradesh, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Chhatisgarh, Orissa and Rajasthan.¹⁵ The objective of this Act is to 'enable Tribal societies to assume control over their destiny and to preserve and conserve their traditional rights over

¹⁵ Aslam, p. 44

natural resources. The State Governments were required to enact their legislations in accordance with the provisions of the Act before the expiry of the one year, i.e., December 23, 1997'.¹⁶ In the Act besides entrusting the Gram Sabha to protect distinct tribal cultures and traditions now 'recommendations of the Gram Sabha or the Panchayats had been made mandatory for granting of licenses for mining lease for the minerals and concessions for the exploitation of minor minerals by auction in the Scheduled Areas'.¹⁷ Other significant powers granted to Gram Sabha under PESA are – ownership of minor forest produce, power to manage village markets, to enforce prohibition or regulate or restrict the sale and consumption of any intoxicants, to prevent land alienation and money lending in the Scheduled Areas, etc.

Functioning of Panchayati Raj: Success and Failures

The objectives to achieve democratic decentralisation and self-government have been the hall mark of PRIs in its rejuvenated form. After the enactment of the 73rd Amendment Act, 1992 initially there was positive response from the States. 'As a result 2, 27, 698 Panchayats at village level, 5, 906 Panchayats at intermediate level and 474 Panchayats at district level were constituted in the country. About 3.4 million people were elected at these different tiers throughout countries'.¹⁸ However, the transfer and devolution of power have not been carried out in letter and spirit of the Act. A number of states failed to take into account the implications of the constitutional spirit of the PRIs and the term 'Institution of Local Self Government'. Without decentralisation of administrative and financial powers PRIs under the State Government often lack necessary autonomy to function as units of self-government. State Governments continue to treat PRIs merely as a mechanism to implement State sponsored developmental schemes. Thus despite of all the States in India having reproduced the Eleventh schedule in their respective legislation regarding Panchayats very few have earmarked any of the function and activities as the exclusive jurisdiction of the Panchayats. Thus we find that 'Panchayats **have not emerged as Institutions of Self-Government** as envisaged under the Constitution (73rd Amendment) Act, 1992'.¹⁹

The functioning of PRI varies from state to state as there are no provisions for uniform allocation of power, funds and functional autonomy to the PRI. State governments are using its discretion in the allocation of work to the PRI. Some states have given all the works mentioned in the eleventh schedule to the PRI where as some state has

¹⁶ Ibid, p. 45

¹⁷ Ibid

¹⁸ Ibid, p. 46

¹⁹ Ibid, p. 48

transferred only few. The models and the functioning of PRI in Kerala, West Bengal, Rajasthan, and Andhra Pradesh have been very successful. But many states have failed to immortalise such success.

To make the PRIs in India more effective and responsive there are a number of measures that need to be taken:

- a. Gram Sabha is truly called heart and soul of the PRIs. Without an effective and vibrant Gram Sabha the ideal of Gram Swaraj and democratic decentralisation can't be achieved. In most cases there is lack of participation in the meetings of Gram Sabha. It is often categorised merely as a discussion forum. Often we find its meeting being hijacked by the rural elite. Of late Government has realised the importance of Gram Sabha in the democratic decentralisation in the country and measures are being taken to strengthen this body. But still this body of Panchayats remains more or less ineffective in the actual functioning of PRIs in India. So the biggest hurdle is to revitalise this body and ensure active participation of the people in its meeting and their ever vigilant role regarding the functioning of Panchayats.
- b. Article 243 G envisages PRIs as units of self-government but leaves the extent and devolution of powers to the will of the state. Thus we find the basic contradictions in the Act itself which is one of the biggest obstructions in the development of Panchayats as the institution of local self-government. Very few States have actually given partial functional and financial autonomy to PRIs. The majority of States treat them merely as an agency to implement developmental schemes of the Central and State governments. So without this crucial functional and financial autonomy PRIs can never function as the institution of local self-government.
- c. One of the biggest challenges before the PRIs is that there is no clear cut demarcation of the works allotted to them. Although, a number of subjects are added in the eleventh schedule of the Indian constitution over which PRIs can make rules, but in actual practices these subjects often overlap with the different agencies of the government. Over and above this even within the PRIs work is not clearly determined for the three levels of Panchayats. Now the government is trying to determine such work through what is called 'Activity Mapping' but it has a long way to go to ensure the effective functioning of PRIs.

- d. PRIs in India also face an acute crisis of administrative personnel committed to the goal of achieving Gram Swaraj. The existing bureaucracy is not just apathetic to the goals of PRIs but it is also difficult for the Panchayats to exercise any control over them. So it is the need of the hour that like UPSC, and State PCSs a separate commission for the selection of Panchayati Raj Personnel should be created.
- e. The presence of MLAs and MPs at the various levels of Panchayats meeting led to unhealthy conflicts. It also influenced the decision making process through local participation. So it requires fresh thinking whether or not MLAs and MPs should be part of PRIs.
- f. 73rd Amendment Act envisages creation of State Finance Commission to ensure the function of Panchayats as a viable and autonomous financial entity. But many States have not yet created it. In many cases its recommendations have not been implemented in true spirit. Thus financially Panchayats remained dependent on the State and Central Governments to execute its plans.
- g. Social Auditing is an important mechanism to make the Panchayats accountable. But sadly in many parts of the country this practice is not effective. This virtually leads to enormous corruption in the schemes of PRIs.

Concluding Remarks

In a country like India with such diversities in terms of culture, language, world views and outlook to democratise the process of governing and ensure the participation of the common people in it is nothing short of an uphill task. Now almost the twenty years of experience has shown that PRIs has proved to be a great mechanism to democratise the system of governance. With the granting of constitutional status its role has become even more important in ensuring the participation of the people in governance and also decentralising the power in the country. PRIs and its elected representative truly represent the characteristics of the People in this country. It has provided a tool in the hands of marginalised communities in the country like SCs, STs and Women to be harbinger of change in the rural India and to take control of their lives. However, rural India is characterised by the Caste relations, poverty, unemployment and underemployment and a tiny elite control the most of the resources. These obstruct free and fair growth of PRIs as the institutions of self-governance. These institutions often

represent the social and political antagonisms of the rural society which is detrimental to its very purpose.

However, the role of PRIs is very critical to deepening of democracy in the country. It has given a sense of empowerment to earlier marginalised communities, particularly for the first time perhaps in the history of India that such a large number of women had got the position of leaderships. They are the catalyst of the rural transformations in contemporary India. Although, the participation of the women is limited due to the Gender hierarchy, nevertheless these women leaders of rural India is certainly creating a gradual space for themselves in the active political life in rural India. One can also acknowledge the role of NGOs, SHGs and Voluntary Organisations in the empowerment of rural India and particularly training the leaders the PRIs who are often unaware or ill informed about the various provisions of Acts and their own power and responsibility.

In some part of the country like Rajasthan a synergy between the PRIs and the Voluntary Organisations and civil society activists has brought about a radical transformation in the legislative practices in the country. The demand for legislation regarding Right to Information was the outcome of this synergy. *Majdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan* (MKSS), Aruna Roy, Nikhil De and others have played an important role in the legislation of Right to Information Act, 2005. Thus despite its various challenges and obstructions PRIs can truly become the source of democratic decentralisation and rural transformation in the country.

Glossary

Panchayats – It is the institutions of local self-government that is constituted at the Village, Block or Inter-mediate and District level;

Gram Sabha – A body consisted of the registered member of the village electoral list. In other words every eligible voter in a Panchayat or within the territory of a Panchayat is considered to be the member of the Gram Sabha. It is also known as the heart and soul of the PRIs;

Village – It is basic unit of collective life in rural India. The status of a village is notified by the circular of the state governments. In some cases many villages are grouped together to form a single Panchayat and in the cases where a village is found too large it can be divided into two or more Panchayats;

Panchayat Samiti – The Panchayats at the intermediate level i. e. between a village and a district is termed as Panchayat Samiti. It is constituted of many village Panchyats. In a state where total number of population is less than 20 lacs Panchayats at the intermediate level may not be constituted;

Zila Parishad – The Panchayats at the district level is often called as Zila Panchayats. It is constituted of all the Panchayats at the intermediate and village level within a district.

Exercises:

Objective Questions:

1. Where for the first time village Panchayat was inaugurated by Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru in 1952?
 - a. Nagaur, Rajashtan
 - b. Nallukottai, Tamil Nadu
 - c. Jhanshi, Uttar Pradesh
 - d. Gwalior, Madhya Pradesh
2. In which article of the Indian constitution prior to 73rd amendment a reference is made about the institution of local self-government i. e. Panchayats?
 - a. Article 39
 - b. Article 43
 - c. Article 38
 - d. Article 40
3. Who was the Prime Minister of India when 73rd amendment to the constitution was passed by the Indian parliament?
 - a. V. P. Singh
 - b. I. k. Gujaral
 - c. P. V. Narsimha Rao
 - d. Rajeev Gandhi
4. 73rd amendment to the Indian constitution came into force on which of the following date?
 - a. December 23, 1992
 - b. April 20, 1993
 - c. April 24, 1993

- d. April 23, 1993
5. Which schedule of the Indian constitution contains the list of subject concerning *PRIs*?
- Schedule IV
 - Schedule VI
 - Schedule VIII
 - Schedule XI
6. How many subjects are there in the eleventh schedule of the Indian constitution?
- 27
 - 29
 - 37
 - 33

Answer: 1 – a; 2 – d; 3 – c; 4 – c; 5 – d; 6 – b


Essay Type Questions:

- Write an essay on the Historical trajectory of PRIs in India?
- What are salient features of 73rd amendment Act? Discuss.
- Critically examine the role of PRIs in democratic decentralisation in India? How far it has been successful as the third tier of government in India?
- What according to you are the main obstacles in functioning of PRIs as the institution of local self-government? How it can be strengthened?
- Critically evaluate the role of Gram Sabha in the successful functioning of PRIs in India.
- What according to you have been the main achievements of the PRIs in India? How it can transform the rural life of India?

Appendix – 1

Eleventh Schedule (Article 243 G, Added by the seventy third constitutional Amendment Act, 1992)

- Agriculture, including agricultural extension
- Land improvement, implementation of land reforms, land consolidation and soil conservation
- Minor irrigation, water management and watershed development
- Animal husbandary, dairying and poultry

- 
5. Fisheries
 6. Social forestry and farm forestry
 7. Minor forest produce
 8. Small scale industries, including food processing industries
 9. Khadi, village and cottage industries
 10. Rural housing
 11. Drinking water
 12. Fuel and fodder
 13. Roads, culverts, bridges, ferries, waterways and other means of communication
 14. Rural electrification, including distribution of electricity
 15. Non-conventional energy sources
 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 activities
 22. Markets and fairs
 23. Health and sanitation, including hospitals, primary health centres and dispensaries
 24. Family welfare
 25. Women and child development
 26. Social welfare, including welfare of the 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

References

Mathur, Kuldeep. 2013. *Panchayati Raj*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press

Bakshi, P. M. 1991/2012. *The constitution of India*, 11th edn., New Delhi: Universal Law Publishing Co.

Government of India. 2001. *Report of the Task Force Report on Panchayati Raj Institutions*. New Delhi: Planning Commission

- _____. 2006a. *Report of the Working Group on Democratic Decentralisation and PRIs*. New Delhi: Planning Commission and Ministry of Panchayati Raj
- _____. 2006b. *The State of the Panchayats: A Mid-Term Review and Appraisal*, New Delhi: Ministry of Panchayati Raj
- _____. 2007. *Local Governance: An Inspiring Journey into the Future*, Second Administration Report, Sixth Report, New Delhi: Government of India
- _____. 2008. *Study on Elected Women Representatives in Panchayati Raj Institutions*. New Delhi: Ministry of Panchayati Raj
- Heller, Patrick, K. N. Harilal, and S. Chaudhary. 2007. 'Building Local Democracy: Evaluating the Impact of Decentralisation in Kerala, India', *World Development*, 35 (4), pp. 626-648
- Jayal, Niraja Gopal. 2003. 'Locating Gender in the Governance Discourse', in *Essays on Gender and Governance*, New Delhi: UNDP Human Resources Development Centre
- Kumar, Ajay. 2012. 'Khap Panchayats: A Socio-Historical Review', *Economic and Political Weekly*, XLVI (4), pp. 59-64
- Manor, James. 1999. *The Political Economy of Democratic Decentralisation*, Washington DC: World Bank
- Mathew, George. 2000. 'Panchayati Raj in India: An Overview', in *Status of Panchayati Raj in States and Union Territories of India*, New Delhi: Institute of Social Science and Concept Publishing Company
- Pal, Mahi. 2009. 'Gram Sabha Meeting in India: Processes, Outcomes and Perspectives', *Journal of Administration and Governance*, 4 (2), pp. 91-93
- Singh, Satyajit and Pradeep Kumar Sharma (eds.). 2007. *Decentralisation: Institutions and Politics in Rural India*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press

Useful Web-links

<http://www.panchayat.gov.in/>
http://www.action-india.org/mahila_panchayat.html
<http://www.mkssindia.org/>

<http://www.localgovernmentindia.org/>
<http://panchayat.nic.in/>

