Value Addition NOTES

Anthropology

UNIT 5.3: Panchayati Raj and social change; Media and Social change

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PANCHAYATI RAJ AND SOCIAL CHANGE

Panchayati Raj System In India- A Brief Note:

The **Panchayati Raj System** is a **three-tier structure of rural local self-government** in India, established to decentralize governance and empower rural communities. It was constitutionally formalized through the **73rd Constitutional Amendment Act, 1992**, which added **Part IX (Article 243 to 243O)** and the **Eleventh Schedule** to the Constitution.

Key Features:

1. **Three Tiers:**
   - ➢ **Gram Panchayat (Village Level)**
   - ➢ **Panchayat Samiti (Block Level)**
   - ➢ **Zila Parishad (District Level)**
2. **Constitutional Status:** Post-1992, Panchayats are constitutionally mandated bodies.
3. **Reservation:** 1/3rd of the seats are reserved for women, and 1/3rd of the seats are reserved for SC/STs.
4. **Elections:** Held every five years by the State Election Commission.
5. **Devolution:** 29 subjects are transferred to Panchayats under the Eleventh Schedule.
6. **Gram Sabha:** Foundation of Panchayati Raj – all adult members of the village constitute this body.
7. **Funding Sources:** Grants-in-aid, taxes, state government support.
8. **Objective:** Decentralized governance, participatory democracy, and rural development.

Meaning of Social Change:

Social change refers to the transformation over time of cultural beliefs, social institutions, norms, values, and behaviours within a society.

Robert Redfield: Social change is the process by which primitive or folk societies evolve into more complex, urbanized civilizations.

Julian Steward: Social change is a result of a society's adaptation to its environment.

N. K. Bose: Social change is the transformation that occurs in the beliefs, practices, and institutions of a society, often resulting from internal developments or external influences, yet shaped and interpreted by the traditional ethos of the people.


Panchayati Raj and Positive Social Change

1. **Democratic Decentralization and Political Participation**

   Andre Béteille emphasized the democratizing potential of Panchayati Raj in breaking feudal structures.
   Explanation: Panchayati Raj empowers rural populations to elect their representatives directly. It allows marginalized communities, especially SCs and STs, to engage in formal political systems.
   Case Study: In Karnataka, post-1983 decentralization reforms, studies showed increased voter turnout among Dalits and participation in public discourse (IRMA Reports, 1995).
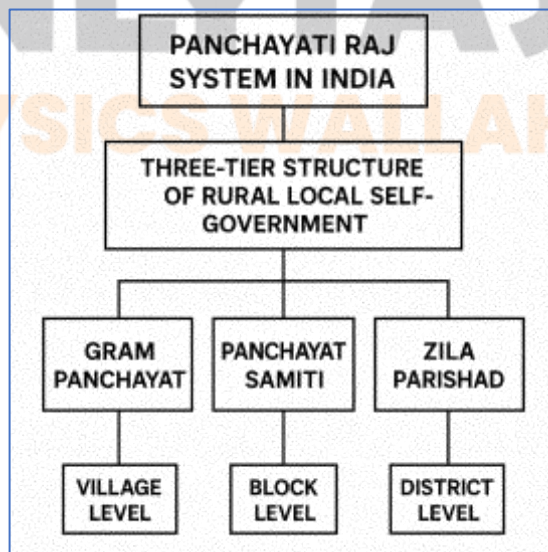
2. **Increased Women's Participation (33% Reservation)**

Nandini Sundar highlights the transformative role of gender quotas in reconfiguring power at the village level.
Explanation: Constitutional reservation for women in PRIs has led to enhanced female leadership and public engagement, challenging patriarchal norms.

Case Study: In West Bengal, under CPI(M), elected women leaders actively promoted literacy and immunization programs, improving development outcomes (Banerjee & Somanathan, 2007).

3. **Strengthening of Grassroots Democracy**

Yogendra Yadav regards PRIs as a means of deepening democracy beyond periodic elections.
Explanation: The Gram Sabha enables deliberative democracy, empowering citizens to question and monitor governance.

Case Study: Kerala's *People's Planning Campaign* (1996) institutionalized local-level planning, giving real decision-making power to citizens.

4. **Access to Welfare Schemes**

D.N. Majumdar believed that PRIs were essential for bridging state policy with rural needs.
Explanation: PRIs act as conduits for schemes like MGNREGA, PMAY, and ICDS, ensuring better implementation.

Case Study: In Rajasthan, MGNREGA, executed through Gram Panchayats, led to improved employment and asset creation in drought-prone districts like Barmer (NIRDPR, 2016).

5. **Social Mobility for Dalits and Adivasis**

M.N. Srinivas discussed how democratic processes can become channels for "Sanskritization" and upward mobility.

Explanation: Reserved seats in Panchayats allow SC/ST leaders to gain political experience and status, reshaping local hierarchies.

Case Study: In Tamil Nadu, SC sarpanches began to command respect and assert decision-making powers, leading to symbolic and material gains (Jodhka, 2002).

6. **Revival of Traditional Leadership Roles**

F.G. Bailey studied how indigenous institutions (e.g., tribal councils) adapt to new administrative structures.
Explanation: Panchayats often co-opt traditional leaders, giving them formal roles while modernizing governance.

Case Study: In Odisha's tribal belts, village headmen (Naiks) became Panchayat members, preserving customary roles within legal frameworks.

7. **Promoting Local Conflict Resolution**

S.C. Dube believed Panchayats could help shift from formal court systems to localized dispute resolution.
Explanation: Panchayats settle minor disputes (land, water, domestic issues), reducing litigation burdens.
Case Study: In Madhya Pradesh, Gram Sabhas regularly resolved family feuds and land boundary disputes through consensus, promoting community cohesion.

8. **Increased Focus on Education and Health**

Veena Das emphasized how local governance can enhance accountability in public service delivery.
Explanation: Panchayats monitor schools, health centres, and Anganwadi services, ensuring they function properly.
Case Study: In Himachal Pradesh, Panchayats with active Mahila Mandals pushed for midday meal programs and school infrastructure improvements.

9. **Building Local Infrastructure**

   D.N. Dhanagare noted the Panchayats' key role in village modernization.

   Explanation: Roads, wells, toilets, and electrification projects are planned and executed through Panchayats.

   Case Study: In Maharashtra, Gram Panchayats successfully used MNREGA funds to construct check dams and small canals, enhancing irrigation.

10. **Catalyst for Rural Development and Planning**

    Radhakamal Mukherjee saw local governance as central to integrating tradition with development.

    Explanation: Panchayats identify community needs and plan development activities, creating inclusive rural strategies.

    Case Study: Under Bihar's *JEEViKA* program, Panchayats formed self-help groups for women, linked with banks and markets to reduce poverty.

Panchayati Raj and Negative Social Change

1. **Elite Capture and Dominance of Upper Castes**

   Andre Béteille noted the tendency of dominant castes to control institutions despite democratization.

   Explanation: Powerful families or caste groups often monopolize Panchayats, sidelining marginalized voices.

   Case Study: In Uttar Pradesh, upper caste Thakurs manipulated electoral outcomes and dominated Gram Sabha meetings, excluding Dalit demands (Jodhka, 2002).

2. **Tokenism in Women's Participation**

   Leela Dube critiqued that real power often remains with male relatives of elected women.

   Explanation: Many women sarpanches are "rubber stamps" for husbands (Sarpanch Patis), undermining genuine empowerment.

   Case Study: In Bihar, women leaders admitted to being front faces while their husbands handled all files and funds (IRMA Gender Study, 2007).

3. **Perpetuation of Caste Conflicts**

   M.N. Srinivas described how caste tensions intensify with political competition.

   Explanation: Elections create animosity between caste groups, leading to violence or boycotts.

   Case Study: In Tamil Nadu's Usilampatti block, the Dalit panchayat president's house was burned after challenging dominant Thevars (The Hindu, 2018).

4. **Corruption and Embezzlement of Funds**

   S.C. Dube warned that without transparency, decentralization invites localized corruption.

   Explanation: Funds meant for welfare are diverted or misused due to weak monitoring.

   Case Study: In Jharkhand, panchayat secretaries inflated MNREGA attendance to siphon wages (CAG Report, 2017).

5. **Lack of Awareness and Training**

   Nirmal Kumar Bose observed that many village leaders lacked the skills needed to govern.

   Explanation: Illiteracy and a lack of knowledge on rules limit effective governance.

   Case Study: In Odisha, many sarpanches couldn't read the budget or maintain records, leading to inefficiencies (PRIA Field Study, 2014).

6. **Exclusion of Tribals in Non-PESA Areas**

   Christoph von Fürer-Haimendorf documented the invisibility of tribal voices in mainstream governance.

   Explanation: In non-scheduled areas, tribal groups do not get autonomy despite cultural differences.

   Case Study: In Andhra Pradesh's coastal agency areas, tribal customs were ignored in water-sharing decisions by panchayats.

7. **Non-Implementation of PESA Act**
   Walter Fernandes criticized the state's reluctance to cede control to tribal communities.
   Explanation: The Panchayat (Extension to Scheduled Areas) Act remains under-implemented.
   Case Study: In Chhattisgarh, mining clearances occurred without Gram Sabha consent, violating PESA provisions.

8. **Poor Devolution of Powers**
   Rajni Kothari remarked that PRIs often lack autonomy in practice.
   Explanation: Many states haven't transferred functions, finances, or functionaries fully to Panchayats.
   Case Study: In Bihar, Panchayats had no say over schools or primary health centres, despite formal mandates.

9. **Gender Bias and Harassment**
   Leela Gulati revealed how rural women leaders face social backlash and exclusion.
   Explanation: Women leaders often experience public ridicule, harassment, and even physical threats.
   Case Study: In Haryana, women sarpanches who took independent decisions were subjected to caste panchayat sanctions.

10. **Fragmentation of Village Solidarity**
    David Mandelbaum observed how political rivalries can erode community bonds.
    Explanation: Panchayat elections create factionalism, disrupting traditional networks of cooperation.
    Case Study: In West Bengal, political party lines within villages created deep divisions and violence during Gram Sabha debates.

MEDIA AND SOCIAL CHANGE

Meaning of Media:

In anthropology, **media** are understood not just as tools of communication (like newspapers, TV, or social media) but as **cultural technologies** that shape and reflect human experiences, meanings, identities, and social relations.

Arjun Appadurai (1996) – from his work *Modernity at Large*

Media, especially electronic media, are part of the **global cultural flow**, shaping imagination, migration, and identity.

Meaning of Social Change:

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Media and Positive Social Change

1. **Dissemination of Democratic Values**
   - *Arjun Appadurai* emphasized "mediascapes" as the flow of images and narratives across borders that encourage civic engagement.
   - **Explanation**: Television and social media platforms help citizens understand rights, elections, and democratic institutions.
   - **Case Study**: *Anna Hazare's India Against Corruption* movement was amplified by 24x7 news channels and social media, leading to the passage of the Lokpal Act in 2013.

2. **Amplification of Marginalized Voices**
   - ➤ *Ulf Hannerz* saw media as a channel for global-local dialogues, giving space to marginalized communities.
   - ➤ **Explanation**: Independent and community-run media platforms give visibility to those ignored by mainstream channels.
   - ➤ **Case Study**: *Khabar Lahariya*, a rural news network run by Dalit and Adivasi women, exposed issues like violence against women and local corruption in UP and MP.

3. **Breaking of Gender Stereotypes**
   - ➤ *Lila Abu-Lughod* analyzed TV serials in Egypt that questioned traditional gender roles.
   - ➤ **Explanation**: Popular serials can reshape perceptions about women, gender, and family roles.
   - ➤ **Case Study**: *Balika Vadhu* challenged child marriage in Rajasthan, leading to public debate and awareness.

4. **Health and Sanitation Awareness**
   - ➤ *Robert Hornik* emphasized that media-led health campaigns influence mass behavior.
   - ➤ **Explanation**: Government media campaigns can change habits on sanitation, hygiene, vaccination, etc.
   - ➤ **Case Study**: *Swachh Bharat Abhiyan ads* broadcast on TV and radio helped improve toilet usage and reduce open defecation, especially in states like Bihar and MP.

5. **Promotion of Education**
   - ➤ *Brian Moeran* studied how the media contributes to literacy and language standardization.
   - ➤ **Explanation**: Educational TV programs and satellite systems provide learning resources to underprivileged areas.
   - ➤ **Case Study**: *EDUSAT*, used in tribal areas of Chhattisgarh and Odisha, broadcasts curriculum-based lessons to remote classrooms.

6. **Cultural Integration and Unity**
   - ➤ *Clifford Geertz* saw media as cultural "performances" that bind diverse populations.
   - ➤ **Explanation**: National TV creates shared experiences and identity.
   - ➤ **Case Study**: In the 1980s, *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* serials on Doordarshan united the nation across regions and religions during weekly viewings.

7. **Enabling Political Mobilization**
   - ➤ *Manuel Castells* analyzed how networked societies enable grassroots movements.
   - ➤ **Explanation**: Social media platforms are used to organize protests, debates, and movements.
   - ➤ **Case Study**: *2020–21 Farmer Protests* in Punjab and Haryana gained national and global attention through Twitter, YouTube, and Instagram.

8. **Documentation of Indigenous Cultures**
   - ➤ *Jay Ruby* advocated for visual anthropology to preserve oral and traditional cultures.
   - ➤ **Explanation**: Documentaries and films archive rituals, festivals, and languages.
   - ➤ **Case Study**: Films on the *Baiga tribe* of MP showcased their sustainable forest life and unique rituals, gaining attention from policy-makers and NGOs.

9. **Social Campaigns and Reforms**
   - *Margaret Mead* believed the media can shape attitudes and trigger reform.
   - **Explanation**: Campaigns like gender equality, anti-smoking, or blood donation are spread through mass media.
   - **Case Study**: *Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao* campaign, launched by PM Modi, gained momentum due to strong media support, especially on FM radio and TV.

10. **Creating Global Awareness on Local Issues**
    - *Appadurai* emphasized the rise of "global ethnoscapes" through media.
    - **Explanation**: Local issues can be brought to global platforms, leading to international pressure and change.
    - **Case Study**: *India's Daughter*, a BBC documentary on the 2012 Delhi rape case, raised international outrage and led to significant legal and social debates in India.

Media and Negative Social Change

1. **Spread of Stereotypes and Misrepresentation**
   - *Stuart Hall* discussed how the media constructs and reinforces stereotypes.
   - **Explanation**: The Media often shows minorities or tribes as exotic, violent, or backward.
   - **Case Study**: Films like *Koyla* and *Jungle* depict Adivasi people as primitive and aggressive, reinforcing negative perceptions.

2. **Commodification of Culture**
   - *Arjun Appadurai* warned against turning sacred culture into commodities.
   - **Explanation**: Rituals and festivals are often reduced to tourist shows or commercial events.
   - **Case Study**: Tribal dance of *Santhals* in Jharkhand performed out of context for hotels and TV shows, stripping it of sacred meaning.

3. **Cultural Homogenization and Loss of Diversity**
   - *Ulf Hannerz* saw a trend of "McDonaldization" in global media.
   - **Explanation**: Local customs and dialects are replaced by national/global media culture.
   - **Case Study**: Rural youth in Tamil Nadu are increasingly adopting English slang, abandoning their local dialects due to the influence of social media.

4. **Cyberbullying and Gendered Harassment**
   - *Deborah Tannen* studied digital gender discourse and the aggression women face.
   - **Explanation**: Women, especially public figures, are often harassed online through trolling, doxxing, and threats.
   - **Case Study**: Female *Journalists* faced repeated death and rape threats for views online, highlighting gender-based media toxicity.

5. **Sensationalism and Misinformation**
   - *Brian Moeran* -emphasized the media's commercial logic of focusing on spectacle and shock rather than accuracy.
   - **Explanation**: Sensational coverage often leads to communal tension and panic.
   - **Case Study**: In 2023, false rumors of child abduction spread rapidly via *Facebook Live* and local news channels in Bihar, resulting in mob violence in Sitamarhi district, where innocent migrants were attacked.

6. **Glorification of Violence and Crime**
   ➤ *George Gerbner* coined the "Mean World Syndrome," where frequent exposure to violent media leads to fear and paranoia.
   ➤ **Explanation**: Media dramatizes crime stories, leading to psychological distress and desensitization to violence.
   ➤ **Case Study**: YouTube channels like *Sansani* and *India Alert* sensationalize real-life murders and domestic violence cases, which some psychologists have linked to increased anxiety among teens and the glorification of vigilante justice.

7. **Erosion of Local Knowledge Systems**
   ➤ *Claude Lévi-Strauss* warned against loss of oral traditions due to modernization.
   ➤ **Explanation**: Folk medicine, agriculture, and weaving knowledge decline as the media promotes modern alternatives.
   ➤ **Case Study**: In Nagaland, elders lament youth ignoring traditional weaving in favour of mass-produced clothes promoted on social media.

8. **Political Polarization and Hate Speech**
   ➤ *Douglas Holmes* studied how media can radicalize ideologies.
   ➤ **Explanation**: Algorithms promote divisive content, deepening political and communal divides.
   ➤ **Case Study**: In 2018, *WhatsApp rumors* in Jharkhand led to mob lynching of innocent villagers suspected of child kidnapping.

9. **Rise of Consumerism and Body Image Issues**
   ➤ *Jean Baudrillard* described media as promoting unattainable lifestyles and body ideals.
   ➤ **Explanation**: Ads sell fairness creams, diet products, and fashion trends that affect youth self-esteem.
   ➤ **Case Study**: *Fair & Lovely* ads linked fairness with success, influencing millions to use harmful skin-lightening products.

10. **Distraction from Real Issues (Media Diversion)**
    ➤ **Anthropologist**: *Noam Chomsky* – in "Manufacturing Consent," criticized the media's role in diverting public attention from structural issues.
    ➤ **Updated Explanation**: News channels often prioritize sensational or entertainment content to maintain viewership, sidelining rural distress or labor exploitation.

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