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* **Title of the Seminar paper: Local Self Governance in Assam**
* **Name of the Learner: Parishmita Rajbongshi**
* **Enrolment no.: 23020991**
* **Name of the programme: Masters of Arts in Political Science**
* **Name of the study centre: Pragjyotish College, Guwahati, 1502**
* **Name of the mentor: Dr. Arpita Das**
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**Abstract**

The state of Assam has had a strong historical tradition of local self-governance. Originating from its village communities. Local Panchayats have been governing the areas and managing local affairs in some forms or another for centuries, long before these were developed into formal institutions with modern legislation with legislative roles. The Assam Panchayat Act, 1994 in alignment with the 73rd Amendment ( 1993)of the Indian Constitution established a three-tier system of PRIs — Gaon Panchayats at village level, Anchalik Panchayats at block level and Zilla Parishads at district level. However, in practice PRIs have faced challenges obtaining the effectiveness with which it has aimed to work for instance due to lack of capacity and skill among elected representatives, overlap between government departments, and uneven distribution of political leaders who hold power over resources available for development across the state. The paper analyses the historical evolution, structure and challenges of PRIs in Assam. Examining how well these institutions prepare and carry out development projects in Assam. In this study, we have adopted a mix of qualitative and quantitative method approach to understand the performance PRIs in Assam. Results tested a significant un-preparedness and way PRIs works, sign that more substantial training is to be there in order to smooth the further development by well perception of roles among them. Finally, in the concluding part paper suggested for future researches and policy interventions to strengthen local self-governance of Assam.

***Keywords:*** Local self-governance, Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs), Assam Panchayat Act, Rural Development.

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**1.Introduction**

Local self-governance has always been a backbone for Assam administrative history. The state's journey towards formalizing local governance began with the Assam Rural Panchayat Act of 1948, which was an early attempt to institutionalise village-level administration. Over the years, various legislative measures have shaped the Panchayati Raj system in Assam, culminating in the Assam Panchayat Act (1994), this Act in alignment with the 73rd Constitutional Amendment, established a structured three-tier system of local governance in Assam. This paper examines how these institutions have evolved to this date and how they are functioning today. Despite all the legal framework aimed at decentralizing governance, the effectiveness of Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) varies. The study seeks an understanding of these variations and would explore the challenges PRIs face in delivering effective governance and development service in Assam.

This study seeks to provide an exhaustive evaluation of the role and performances under which three tier panchayati Raj has been functioning in Assam. The key question here is what has been the role and performance of PRIs at various levels- Gaon, Anchalik, Zilla parishad providing local governance as well enabling resources mobilization for carrying out development schemes.

It further explores the constraints to PRIs in Assam and looks into areas such as capacity building of PRIs , allocation of resources for them , inter- governmental coordination etc. Lack of full financial independence , lack of infrastructure and human resources limitation among other impacting the functioning in practice of PRIs. The paper in addition examines political interference and corruption, both of which impact local governance by eroding the credibility as well as efficiency of PRIs.

In form of PRIs mark an important development for governance reforms in Assam but challenges confronting these similar bodies point to need for sustained endeavour at institutional strengthening. Addressing the key concerns can help PRIs contribute more effectively towards rural development and empowering local communities in Assam. It is a contribution to ongoing debate on local governance India, and can provide knowledge based inputs for policy making and professional practice in the area of panchayati Raj. (the local self government system in India) .

**2.Objectives**

***The aims of this study is as follows:***

1. The transition of PRIs in Assam is examined from an backdrop historical foundations to the current dimensions and workings of local governance.

2. This is an evaluation study on the performance of three-tier Panchayati Raj system in Assam such as assessment of the roles and Panchayats (GPs) Gram Panchayats, Mandal Parliament (APs), and Zilla Parishads(ZPs) in local governance.

3. Challenges faced by PRIs: Identification of issues regarding capacity building, maintenance roles, inter-governmental funds transferring problem among higher and lower Panchayats.

4. Resource allocation and coordination between different levels of PRIs / government departments in Assam.

5. To study the effects of PRIs on rural development: This involves reviewing how the way PRIs are working, has a multipronged impact on different sectors of rural development such as infrastructure, Health, Economy, Culture, Education and Livelihood.

6. To recommend for future improvement: Pending the data, paper will propose ways to deal with the limitations of PRIs in Assam. We are focusing on governance reforms, resource management and capacity building.

**3.Literature Review**

The concept of local self-governance in India, particularly in the form of Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) have been broadly studied since The 73rd Constitutional Amendment of 1992, highlighting a significant shift towards decentralised governance, mandating the establishment of PRIs across states in India. This journey started with traditional village councils and formalised with the Assam Rural Panchayat Act of 1948. In Assam, Subsequent reforms, including the Assam Panchayat Acts of 1959, 1972, 1986, and The 1994 Act, have shaped the current three-tier system. Despite the advancements, challenges remain in form. Research by Bordoloi (2012) and Mohanty (2005) highlights that while PRIs are crucial for rural development, they often need help with capacity issues and uneven performance across regions. Recent studies, such as by Ghosh (2017) and Baruah (2019), underscore the importance of effective capacity building and the role of women and marginalised groups in enhancing the effectiveness of PRIs in Assam. The literature suggests that despite improvements, many PRIs still need to work on fulfilling their mandate effectively.

**4.Methodology**

***Research Approach:***

The current study uses a mixed-method research design to offer an holistic view of the functioning and constraints in Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) of Assam; it integrates qualitative with quantitative results so that no offence is made.

Qualitatively, the study is based on interviews with main stakeholders such as PRI members, government officials and community representatives. These interviews will be used to extract both personal and professional learning as well and on-ground behavioural aspects of the challenges faced by PRIs till date. This is the quantitative part coming from government reports and records at PRI. This data covers a wider range including allocation of resources, performance metrics and the differences between the Regions

***Data Collection Methods:***

The Data collection was conducted in two stages. Secondary data has been collected initially by gathering from available government records and research papers specially from internet. This data served to provide a foundation for understanding the historical and legislative background of PRIs.

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In the subsequent round of interviews and focus group discussions, primary data were collected. Best interviews of PRI members and other officials provides worth of experience and challenges in Local

governance. In addition to this, the focus groups across many rural villages of Assam provided insights into how local governance works on the ground.

***Analysis:*** Using thematic and statistical methods, these data were analysed to assess current patterns and trends in Assam.

**5.Analysis and Results**

***5.1. History of Panchayati Raj in Assam:***

This evolution of PRIs in Assam clearly highlights a move towards decentralisation and local governance. The formalisation process began with the Assam Rural Panchayat Act of 1948—subsequent legislative changes, culminating in this act made up a structured three-tier system starting from traditional village councils.

The system was introduced with the hope of distributing decision-making power and making local governance more effective. While on the ground, performance in terms of economy and ,culture and so forth varies from district to district.

***5.2. Functioning of PRIs in Assam***

There is wide variation in the performance of PRIs across Assam. The importance of Gaon Panchayats (GPs) for local governance, resource mobilisation and service delivery continue to be the two major challenges faced by GPs. APs and ZPs suffer from difficulties in co-ordination, financial management.

***1 . Functions of Panchayati Raj Institutions in wards:***

PRIs in Assam Provide a Wide Range of Services, Functions and Responsibilities to the People for rural development, self-governance.

among the key functions are:

* development, e.g. infrastructure development, education delivery models, health including nutrition, hospitals , treatments etc., agriculture practices, mainstreaming implications/meta/indices/info/etc.
* Other Local Development: PRIs are in charge of the design and implementation of programs for local Sources of Revenue: PRIs get income from a variety of resources that include taxes, prices and service fees levied through the Zilla Parishad as well as grants received by its government.
* Service Delivery – PRIs: The different public bodies at the local, district and state levels are responsible for delivering essential services to communities, such as drinking water programmes; community sanitation schemes (schools programme of integrated wasteland development); rural roads maintenance work etc.
* Conflict resolution: Often PRIs have a say in solving the local disputes and conflicts. ( Gaon ka Mukhia , Gaon burha , Panchayat Ji etc. Members of panchayat with power and duty to regulate a whole circle ).
* Community Development: PRIs help organizes community development work alongside activities and schemes pertaining to women's empowerment, the youth in question that also apart from social welfare programmes.
* Representation: PRIs represent the interest of local communities at state and national level.

***2 There are some specific functions of different tiers*** :

* Gaon Panchayats: For local development projects, provision of basic amenities and keeping village records.
* Anchalik Panchayats: APs look after the functions of GP within their area, oversee development programs and distribute resources.
* Zilla Parishads: Govern the whole district and co-ordinate with AP & GP work, provide resoruces to sector.

PRIs can function differently according to the needs and conditions of different areas in Assam. But ultimately, the aim of all this is to empower a community to make them understand. this emphasize on sustainable development and women empowerment with overall progress, removing discrimination based on vague reasons , which will give more better results to communities.

GPs play an important role in local governance, yet they struggle to fulfill the mobilisation of resources, service delivery. Village, Anchalik and Zilla Panchayats. There are also challenges in (ZPs) engagement with the management and coordination of financial matters.

Now in second part, it covers the challenges faced by PRIs; Till this date what its known about constraints in relation to capacity of elected representatives with power deficits, unsatisfactory allocation, and insufficient integration among the various layers of governance. This affects their capacity to efficiently execute development designs and convey.

***5.3. Challenges Faced by PRIs***

Several challenges, including capacity or power deficits amongst elected representatives/members of PRIs inadequate resource allocation to them poor coordination between various levels of governance with the PRI system have been facing remarkably. It has been compromising the effectiveness for development schemes and rendering services to achieve the outcome of growth.

More particularly in Gaon Panchayats (GPs) GPPs and pani panchyat still need to play a major role in local governance, however; comes under challenge on resource mobilisation as well delivery of the service. In Rural Areas — Anchalik Panchayats (APs) and Zilla Parishads

(ZPs) they are also suffering from the same issue of in coordination with financial management.

***5.4. Emerging Issues in Panchayati Raj Institutions of Assam***

***1. Lack of economy autonomy:***

* State Government Dependent: PRIs from Assam is usually reliant for finance on the state government funding, thus curtailing its capacity to consolidate local priorities and having a cutting-edge initiative portfolio causes long Time Planning, Slower Growth in resuts and to deveopement.
* Insufficient Allocations: The allocations from the Assam government may not be enough to fulfill PRIs demand, specificay in rural backward areas which do not have much revenue generating capacity.

***2. Why Is There A Lack Of Infrastructure And Human Resources?***

* Limited Access to Technology: Most of the PRIs in Assam rely on outdated technology, which affects their efficiency for resource management and interfacing with citizen as well as service delivery.
* Shortage of Skilled persons — the shortage of trained personnel, especially in technical fields such as engineering and accounting impede PRIs from being fully operationalised in Assam currently. This also includes the lack of skills in political leader or in a representative or in members of PRIs to regulate the administrative works and the specific circle properly.

***3. Political interferences and Corruptions:-***

* Influence of Political Parties: In Assam we often get to see political parties exerting undue influence over PRIs, which Further results in decisions that may not be exactly what was required by the local communities at a particular time.
* Corruption and Mismanagement: Of particular concern is the risk that corruption within PRIs could tank public rely on, misuse belongings meant for improvement projects. Assam Comparison to other states , the slow rate of growth reflects in the level and comparison with some of the better-performing States.

***4. Social and Cultural Barriers***:

* Religion Divisions: Another biggest challenge which makes the functioning of PRIs non-effective is religion barriers i.e. caste and class mainly Religion divisions that limit participation in communities itself.
* Gender Inequality- This 'nexus' of gender inequality can restrict women's participation in PRI governance, thus the less representation of woman being an obstacle for overall growth in a community and It needs to address the women specific.

***5. Marginalized Group Social Integration:*** Issues facing Indigenous Peoples; as a result, bad representation , neglecting behaviour from authorities can face difficulties to participate in the governance of PRI locals. they also have language and cultural barriers, negative images over other outsiders and these facts are what have let them down when it comes to influencing the decision process and in government services.

***6. Marginalisation of Minorities*** : Other socially marginalised communities too, such as SCs and STs, religious or linguistic minorities might be deprived from the decision making processes.

A holistic approach that combines increased better infrastructure and human resources, anti-corruption measures along with inclusive democratic vision with also contemporary challenges.

**6.Discussion**

**6.1. *Critical Evaluation of Results:***

The analysis of the functioning of Panchayati Raj Institutions(PRIs) in Assam reveals both strengths and weaknesses in the current system within the government. On the positive side, the establishment of a three-tier system has created a smooth - formal structure for local self-governance, ensuring that decision-making powers are decentralized to the grass root levels. This also has enabled the both greater lower community participation in governance and provided a platform for local leaders to emerge on national level.

However, the study also highlights some significant challenges that undermine the effectiveness of PRIs in Assam. The lack of capacity among elected representatives is a major issue which can be seen particularly at the Gaon Panchayat (GP) level. Many PRI members lack the necessary knowledge and skills to effectively carry out their roles, to lead the inefficiencies in governance and service delivery. This has compounded by the inadequate allocation of resources, which limits the ability of PRIs to implement development schemes and deliver services effectively and more beneficial way. The study also found significant regional disparities in the performance of PRIs, that some districts performance are quite much better than some others. So ,this may indicate some underlying structural and administrative issues that need to be addressed soon to ensure that PRIs can function effectively across the state equally.

Another significant limitation that has found from this study is the limited financial autonomy of PRIs in Assam. Their reliance on the Assam government for funding can hinder their ability to prioritize local needs and implement innovative projects for desired outcome . Insufficient allocations from the state government may also restrict the ability of PRIs to address the much needed demands of their communities.

The functioning of PRIs is also hampered by inadequate infrastructure and human resources. Many PRIs lack access to modern technology, obstructing their ability to efficiently manage resources, communicate with citizens, and deliver services. Additionally, a shortage of skilled trained personnel can limit the effectiveness of PRI governance in Assam.

Pointing out to Political interference and corruption are the other challenges that can weakens the credibility and effectiveness of PRIs. Political parties may put unnecessary influence over these institutions, leading to decisions that may not be in the best interests for local communities. Corruption and mismanagement within PRIs can also ruin public trust over government and divert resources away from development projects for own sake of selfish interests.

Social and cultural barriers can also hinder the effective functioning of PRIs. Mainly the divisions in name of religion (Hindu – Muslim) can limit participation and create divisions within communities, while gender inequality, discrimination on woman can limit the participation of women in PRI governance resulting less growth of a state .

Last but not least , the limited capacity building opportunities of PRI members can also create a challenges. Many PRI members may lack the necessary skills and knowledge and power to effectively manage their responsibilities, leading to poor decision-making and inefficient local governance.

Summarizing the whole study , one side while the evolution of PRIs in Assam represents a positive step towards decentralization within it's challenges remain . To ensure the effectiveness functioning of these institutions, it is essential to address challenges such as financial autonomy, poor infrastructure, unskilled human resources, political parties- leaders interference, social and cultural, Regional barriers, and capacity building, by addressing most of these challenges PRIs can serve the better needs of local communities and contribute to the sustainable development of Assam in future.

**6.2. *Implications***

The results of this study are significant in the context that they can help inform future policy with regard to local self-governance in Assam.

Firstly , a specific initiative for capacity building with increased knowledge and skills for elected representatives, specially at the GP level in Assam of well-functioning institutions to standardize performance across participating legislators. Those may include some trainings, workshops and whatever it takes to make members of the PRI do their job more professionally and effectively specially with skills.

Secondly, we certainly need to redistribute resources so all PRIs can do their responsibilities properly. That would be in terms of redefining the criteria for fund allocation so as to get support needed by less developed districts, so that they emerge and do well on economic cultural and in modernisation growth.

Thirdly, there is the requirement of better co-ordination between various levels among PRIs and with outside, besides the states departments. This may include specifications of role and responsibilities between the levels of PRIs and creating structures for more co-ordination , interaction and linkages between these people.

The study underlines the significance of women and marginalised populations in local communities (rural areas). Their representation has improved now, thanks to greater reservation quotas, but their effective participation in the decision-making processes is yet not enough. This may include focused mechanisms of assistance and capacity building to empower these communities and the local governance itself as well across-administration.

A good PRI can strengthen the democracy in the grass root level by encouraging more citizen involvement and better accountability. It can help to deal with social inequality and economic inequality, including socio-political rights of underprivileged sectors by addressing specific needs of marginalized communities in all the sphere for equal development. The need of increment in local autonomy in decision making and access to services in central so that PRIs being an agent of rural development enabling communities to bottom up themselves and take initiatives to empower these groups and ensure that their voices are heard in local governance and higher administration. Although these efforts can face challenges such as limited resources and political interference that hamper their effectiveness. Solving these development problems of rural areas like poverty, illiteracy and absence of basic technology will depend on their capacity to redress these weaknesses that they face.

**7.Conclusion**

**7.1.*Summary of Key Points, Main Findings, and Their Significance:***

This seminar paper shows the journey of Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) in Assam, highlighting how these local governance bodies have evolved over centuries, Despite having challenges regarding decentralizing power and promoting local community development, legislative advances, resource allocation, and coordination persist, addressing these issues are crucial for improving the effectiveness of local governance These include limited financial autonomy, a shortage of skilled personnel, political leaders , political interference, and social- cultural challenges . However, the underneath potential of PRIs to drive meaningful change in rural areas is significant, especially if they are given the right support and resources from state government and locals . The findings of this study emphasize the need for stronger capacity-building efforts and for better resource management to help PRIs to fulfill their roles effectively and with loyalty.

**7.2.*Limitations:***

This study includes some limitations as it has primarily relied on secondary data, which may not fully covered the diverse and evolving contemporary challenges that PRIs has been facing in different parts of Assam. The primary data, gathered from interviews and focus groups from limited number of communities might not be representative of the broader state. Additionally, the study also has lack the exploration on influence of broader state-level political and economic policies on the effectiveness of PRIs, which could play significant role in it's functioning and administrative works.

**7.3*.Recommendations for Future Research:***

Future research would consider a more detailed, on ground approach, studying a wider range of communities across Assam for better understanding the contemporary challenges PRIs encounters in day to day level . Comparing districts that perform well with those that could not able to perform well in terms of overall growth that would put a light on what leads to the actual success in local governance in Assam . Future research could benefit from larger research samples and additional data collection methods that will explore the impact of capacity-building initiatives, examine the role of local and marginalised groups , the political parties and it's challenges in more depth, and assess the effectiveness of resource allocation strategies.

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