

Panchayat Sabha's significance in Community Development

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Abstract

The literal meaning of decentralizations transferring decision making power and function from the central government to the local bodies with a view to transform the society and inject a greater degree of efficiency. Democratic decentralization seeks to associate the people's participation in the decision making process at the local level.

Key words: Decentralization, Efficiency

Introduction

Decentralization both practical and administrative, is the means of promoting people's participation and co-operation in the process democratic decentralization and development .There exists a triangular relationship between decentralization, democracy and development.

Soon after the creation of the new ministry of community development in January 1957, the Government of India appointed a committee under the chairmanship of Balwan Rai Mehta to study the working of the Community Development Programme (CDP) and suggest how best it could be maintained and implemented. The committee recommended a three tier system of Government furnish with christened a Panchayati Raj by Jawaharlal Nehru .At the grass roots or village level were to be panchayat samities, and the apex or the district level, Zillaparishad were to be formed. These new bodies were to have wide power and adequate finance. The committee offered two broad directional thrust, first it argued that there should be Administrative decentralization for the effective implementation of development programmes and second, that the decentralized administration should be under the control of elected body.

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The three tier structure of Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRI) was brought about existence after the Mehta Committee scheme was approved by the National Development Council (CDC) in January 1958. The NDC affirmed the objective behind the introduction of democratic institutions at the district and block levels, and suggested that each state should work out the structure , which suited its conditions best

The new system of panchayati Raj Institution (PRI) was first adopted in Rajasthan and Andrapradesh in 1959, followed by Assam, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka in 1960, Maharashtra in 1962 and Gujarat and West Bengal in 1963 and 1964 respectively. The new system was implemented without any reservation in Rajasthan, Andrapradesh, Tamil Nadu and Assam.

In the rest of the states, the response varied from reluctant implementation to dilution, diarchy and ritualism in the system. With the operationalisation of 73rd Constitution Amendment, a three tire structure of Panchayati Raj Institutions has been adopted all over the country. Significantly the 73rd Constitution Amendment does not have a provision for constitution of Grama Sabha but stipulates that their powers and functions are be specified by the state legislatures. However, in the extended Act, constitution of GramSabha is

mandatory and it is tended to be endowed with specific power and functions. Thus, now Gramasabha became a constitutional body and is envisaged as the foundation of Panchayat Raj system.

But still we are far from actual realization of various provisions of the 73rd Amendment Act. It has been a decade since the process of decentralization began. However, it is quite evident that there are still areas of concern that are very crucial for the efficiency of the local institutions.

The GramaPanchayat members lack the requisite capabilities for undertaking the task of development planning and implementations. They are unaware of the tasks that they are expected to perform. The delivery system at GramaPanchayat level is weak and is not able to ensure the availability of basic services to the people.

The GramaSabha has been conceived as the primary body in Panchayati Raj System intended to facilitate direct participation of local people in activities which were concerned with the planning and development of their area. However there is a vast difference between the statutory provisions and the practice so far as the functions of the GramaSabha are concerned.

In spite of decades long development efforts to uplift the marginalized sections, especially scheduled communities, they remain the backward. In the Kerala model of development. Marginalized sections like Women and scheduled castes from the outliers, from the central tending of progress in social indicators.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

GLOBAL SCENARIO

Decentralization is the transfer of decision making powers to more directly concerned, lower levels of government and administrative authority.

Decentralization is a major phenomenon in today's world. The decentralization record provides only scattered evidence of improving govt. Services or building up infrastructure for economic development. In Mumbai, local community involvement is said to have substantially improved follow-up on immunization. More than, 3000 miles of secondary and feeder roads were constructed in Liberia in the 1970's, with the help of local development councils. Several experiments in Africa as far back as the early 1950's produced. Remarkable success at building basis infrastructure including roads, schools, clinics, bridges and markets.

In Chile, the limited decentralization carried out under the authoritarian Pinochet regime led to a worsening of student test scores and a widening of educational differentials among socio- economic groups between 1982 and 1988. In health, decentralization was accompanied by cuts in resources and the introduction of user charges: hospitals got more income while clinics got less. In Philippines, immunization rates declined after a rapid decentralization. The govt. officials and health workers revealed that emergency room and operating room drugs were far less available than before. In Kenya, the improvements from health decentralization are difficult. Infant mortality declined 22% from 96 in 1970 to 75 in 1985-2000.

Decentralization projects in Bolivia, Mali, the Philippines and Ukraine found that, "turning representation in to empowerment, benefits and poverty reduction was proven difficult". Decentralization might produce better results in some countries from 1987 to 1993, the North Brazilian state of Ceara registered an annual growth rate of 3.4%. The Brazilian national rate was 0.87% and the North East region of Brazil experienced a 0.04% decline.

DECENTRALISATION: A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE :IN INDIA

“King’s and dynasties fought and failed ,empires rose, ruled, misruled and disappeared, but the villager’s life maintained its even tenor, away from the din of battle and the rush of rising and falling empires. we had a village state which protected the life and property and which made civilized life possible”-Mahathma Gandhi said in Harigen, dated Dec. 8, 1946. According to Gandhiji and other patriotic leaders, India could attain ‘Ram Rajya’ only by going back to certain golden traditions of ancient India as well as by revising the indigeneous institution that will suits in Indian culture.

India acquired experience of economic planning during the year of her progress. Most of this experience relates to centralized macro level planning. Planning is a conscious and deliberate choice of economic priorities by some public authority. The basic ideology of planning is that the government take an active or decisive role in a national economy in shaping its direction. Planning originally belongs to the socialist system, under which major parts of the means of development has spread to countries other than socialist ones. The aim of planning in India is rapid economic growth, abolition of poverty and unemployment, the reduction of inequalities, industrialization and establishment of a socialist pattern of society. The major allegation against the conventional planning process in India was that we had followed more a centralized rather than decentralized strategy for formulation and implementation of plans. The planning aims at a complete transformation of socio-economic structure of state.

Decentralization of rural and urban governments began even before independence, In India, economic planning was adopted as an instrument of development in 1951. During the pre independence period a few unofficial development plans were prepared at the initiative of nationalists like DadabhaiNaoroji (1825-1917), M.G.Ranade (1842-1909) and the leading industrialists of the country.

The national planning committee under the chairmanship of Sri Jawaharlal Nehru formed in 1918, did the pioneering work from the point of view. The Bombay plan formulated by a group of industrialists of Bombay, the Gandhian plan of Sri. Sriman Narayanan and the peoples plan by Sri. M.N.Roy of the Indian federation of labour, can be considered as the fore-runners of India’s Five Year plans. After the attainment of independence, the government of India setup the Planning Commission in 1950 with the Prime Minister as its chairman. The planning commission prepared at the first five year plan in 1951 and this marked the actual beginning of planning in India.

GRAMA SABHA IN THE CONTEXT OF KERALA

Unlike many other states in India, Kerala has made rapid strides in social development, which should naturally have a positive impact on the functioning of bodies like Gram Sabha. For example, high rate of literacy enable people to read and understand documents relating to Panchayat governance and planning. The relatively small area of most Panchayats as well as the composition of the Gram Sabha in each ward also should contribute to greater participation. Because most parts of Kerala have access to reasonably good infrastructural and communicational facilities, it is not difficult to communicate to the public about Gram Sabha meeting. The state is also known for progressive movements and a high degree of political consciousness and political partnership.

Panchayats are institutions of self-government. They are integral part of our federal policy. The 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendment Act have given constitutional status and backing to all local government institutions and provide a prime work for state level legislation. The Constitutional Amendments enacted on Panchayatiraj (rural areas) and Nagarapalika (urban local bodies) respectively came into force from 20th April 1993. It was therefore left to each state to take a conscious decision. In the matter of power and authority and conditionalities if any. The financial and Administrative devolution of powers are guaranteed under the Constitutional Amendments. Under the 73rd Amendment, dealing with rural local bodies listed in Act 243 must have a three tier PR system with panchayats at village, intermediate and district levels.

Several state governments are still dragging their feet in regard to effective decentralization. The LDF government of Kerala which came to power in 1996. Started the exercise of decentralized planning for the 9th plan. By transferring powers to local bodies, the Government of Kerala made a significant progress in decentralization of planning. From the first Kerala Ministry (1957) to date, the history of Kerala's decentralization process has been influenced by the ups and downs of coalition politics in the State (World Bank 2004). The left Democratic Front (LDF) Government which came to power in 1996, decided to pick up the task of decentralized planning. Accordingly, the State Govt setup a committee in July 1996, under the chairmanship of West Bengal Finance Commission chairman S.B. Sen. The Sen committee had also recommended devolution of more powers to GramaSabha and minimize Govt role in Block Panchayats, it should first send a showcause notice and give a week's time for reply and it should be submitted to the State's Ombudsman. The ombudsman is a well thought out mechanism which has been constituted by the state to probe into the allegations of corruptions, nepotism, misrule, mis appropriation of funds etc in local bodies in Kerala.

When the B.R. Mehta committee was at work, Govt of Kerala constituted a committee for suggesting administrative reforms on August 15, 1957 headed by the Chief Minister. The terms of reference of the committee, interalia covered suggestions of methods for democratization of the organs of Govt of various levels with a view to effective participation of Local self-governing institutions and other representative bodies in the administration. Kerala Panchayat Bill and Kerala District council Bill were introduced on the Dec.9, 1958 and on April 16, 1959 respectively. The Kerala Panchayati Raj Bill 1967, which contemplated a two-tier system. Panchayat at the basic level and ZillaParishads at the district level also could not become law. Subsequently the Kerala District Administration Bill 1971 introduced the Assembly also met with the same fate.

According to the Sencommittee's report, the panchayat have direct controls over agriculture, rural development, health, traditional medicines, social, general education and public work. On the basis of the committee's recommendation, Govt of Kerala decided to initiate the 9th five year plan as peoples plan.

A large number of people's organizations youth organizations and so on exist in Kerala capable of articulating people's needs and exercising control over the Gram Panchayat. All these features should make Gram Sabhas in the state of Kerala more participatory and contribute to the emergence of a vibrant rural civil society. At the same time, the concepts of its organic and affective sense is absent in most mal areas in Kerala characterized by dispersed settlement patterns. Gram Sabha is an institutional mechanism of participatory democracy. It provides an opportunity to all the people participate in the development process.

GramaSabha is the only body, which at least symbolically conveys the idea that political sovereignty rests with the people. The number of persons attending the Gram Sabha, the nature of the topics discussed, the quality of discussions and the intensity of participation are important factors contributing to the success of Panchayati Raj institutions. As this is the only body with a direct bearing on civil society, the functioning of this body and the strategies for strengthening it should be explored in detail. The Gram Sabha invested with statutory authority to suggest action and seek explanations from the elected representatives of the Gram Panchayat, is a new experience in Kerala. With the introduction of participatory decentralized planning popularly known as "people's planning", Gram Sabha secured an opportunity to formulate plans on the basis of the realities of the village economy, ecology and socio-economic conditions of the population.

Conclusion:

Decentralization of power in the true sense could be made a reality only by strengthening the panchayat level local bodies. Particularly the GramaSabhas. The biggest advantage of this process is that it would facilitate planning at the grass root level. The purpose of the study is to examine in detail the role of GramaSabha meeting in Edava Grama Panchayat.

Kerala was one of the first state in India which sought to decentralize power and administration as early as 1957 – 59. During that period a report was prepared by the chief minister E.M.S. Namboodiripad in his capacity as chairman of the Administrative Reforms Committee which formed the basis for formulating ideas on Panchayat and other institutions of local Self Government in the state.

In Kerala elections were held in September 1995 to elect representatives to the three-tier local self-govt institutions. The LDF govt which came to power after the election in April 1996, launched a massive programme- ‘ Power to the People’ on 17th August 1996 with a view to ensure peoples active participation in the planning process at the grass root level.

The purpose of this study, as has already been stated, is to examine in detail the role of GramaSabha in realizing the objective of democratic decentralization at the grass roots level in Kerala. The empirical study conducted personally under the direct supervision of a project co-ordinator, on the basis of a questionnaire which has thrown up several findings regarding the role of GramaSabha.

In the modern World, the economic planning has got much significance as for as the sustained economic development and social justice are concerned. Now a days the planning concept has also changed to suit almost all the needs of the people.

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