

PANCHAYATI RAJ AND FIVE YEAR PLANS IMPLEMENTATION – A STUDY

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Abstract

In this paper author seeks to present political hierarchy and Panchayat India's lower house, the Lok Sabha, is modelled on the British House of Commons, but its federal system of government borrows from the experience of the United States, Canada and Australia. While the framers of the Indian constitution certainly had in mind this Anglo-Saxon idea of federalism, historically the central government has dominated over the regional states. After the Independence, the Government of India was dedicated to set up Panchayati Raj institution to provide real Swaraj to the rival people of India, to eradicate poverty, illiteracy, unemployment, diseases etc. The aim was to foster democratic participation to involve villagers in the development effort and to ease the administrative burden on the states. The subject of implementation of the Panchayati Raj was compiled in the state list. In the initial years after gaining independence, no efforts were made for the setting up of the Panchayati Raj. The constitutional reference acted as the stimulus to make efforts for the operationalization of the Panchayati Raj in country right from the decades after Independence. In the Post-Independence times, despite the real and favor for democratization of the polity in the members of the constituent assembly, the Gandhian plea for a village-based system of political formation fostered by states. Classless society was initially rejected by the congress constitution committee, believing that the congress could neither forgo its political role nor become so utterly decentralized.

Keywords— Indian political system, hierarchy, Panchayati Raj, political reforms, local self-government.

Introduction

India has greater diversities in terms of culture, languages, caste groups and economic stratification apart from authoritarian political tradition. Side by side the demands for eradication of proportion and require massive efforts. This challenging taste emphasizes economic priorities and increasing public participation to fulfill the rising expectations of the vast masses. At the same time aspiration aroused by political freedom requires a widening of the base for political participation with a view to contain the force of diversities; the emerging trend is tilting the balance towards decentralization. Many efforts in India were made after independence, both by individuals and voluntary association for rural reconstruction by decentralizing the political and administrative powers. The pattern of decentralization as evolves in India involves both the delegation or decentralization and devolution or transfer of political and administrative powers. The concept of decentralization, as it applies to India, present a different approach to the decentralization of political and administrative powers. Having its mixed goals of democracy, decentralization and development, it refers to the programmes and tendencies which implies devaluation of governmental power and responsibilities, decentralization of political institutions, development of local leadership and strengthening the efforts for economic modernization. It means the authority of special rights to local institution or local government at local level so that they can solve their problems at their level. It has very importance. Mahatma Gandhi had also emphasized on decentralization. Independent India had also adopted this concept due to democracy. India is very big country, without decentralization, it can't be developed.

India is a secular country too. Decentralization helps to maintain secularity.⁶ Numerous countries are experimenting with decentralization initiatives to devolve powers and responsibilities to elected councils at the lower tiers of the political and administrative system. James Manor and Richard Crook, who have made one of the most important and recent contributions to the decentralization studies. Genes, say that decentralization is the more general term for the transfer of power away from a central authority to lower levels in a territorial hierarchy (Manos and Crook 1998, 6). This can happen in two ways, by either deconcentration or devolution and each way has its own „logic“. This can happen in two ways, by either de-concentration which means that the Centre relocates its offices and officers to place located outside the administrative Centre or the capital. The central government, however, does not give up any of its authority in this process. Devolution however, has the opposite effect. It means that the central government gives up some of its power for example, to tax and spend, and may even have only limited or minor legislative competence. In other words, decentralization is the umbrella term for reallocating power in certain way and devolution and de-concentration are two different methods used for different purposes.⁸ Decentralization can be defined as „ Decentralization leads to the empowerment of the local people through de-concentration and devolution decentralized governance seeks to tap local initiatives and practices by involving grass roots organizations such as self-help groups representative democracy and participatory democracy by become possible through decentralized governance. Another important feature of decentralized governance is interactive policy making which leads to decentralized decision making. Interactive policy is a process where government and non-governmental sectors such as private sector, non-governmental organizations, and pressure groups all participate in decision-making so as to influence issue and suggest alternatives. Therefore, decentralized governance is an alternative strategy of development which is people- centered, participatory and bottom-up the people will have a better understanding of what the government does. It is an extension of the democratic principle aims at widening the area of the people’s participation, authority and autonomy through devolution of power to people’s The transfer of Power from the Centre of public administration at the state or regional level to public administration units at a lower level of the bureaucratic hierarchy or elected bodies at the same level or a lower level.⁹ Post-independence India adopted a democratic system of governance. Institution of democracy in India developed mechanism. Decentralized governance is good for the people; in fact it began to grow during the colonial rule. The provision of democracy was found in India, in 1950. In India, Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru and Jai Prakash Narayan described Democracy as the government that gives „Power to the People“. Gandhi said, “True democracy could not be worked by some persons sitting at the top. It had to be worked from below by the people of every village.” Democracy at the top could not be a success unless it was built from below. In India the Panchayati Raj institutions can set an example for the world to emulate in the matter of democratic decentralization.

Objective:

In this paper author seeks to present political hierarchy and Panchayati raj - However, Gandhi’s stubbornness with the Idea of Panchayati Raj finding a place in the constitutional framework of the country Right to Information Act has been a cornerstone a cornerstone in Indian democracy is paper aims at looking at this feature in Greater detail.

During the mid-fifties the planners emphasized the importance of people’s participation in the planning process. This, according to them, could be achieved through democratic decentralization with the district as the kingpin of the planning

structure. In 1957 the planning commission appointed a study team with Sri. Balwant Rai Mehta as its chairman. The study team made an assessment of the functioning of the community development blocks and plan projects. In its report the Balwant Rai Mehta committee noted, “So long as we do not discover or create a representative and democratic institution which will supply local interest, supervision and care necessary to ensure that expenditure of money upon local objects conforms to the needs and wishes of the locality, invest it with adequate power and assign to it appropriate finances, we will never be able to evoke local interest and excite local initiative in the field of development. The report submitted by the committee made a plea for decentralization. It recommended establishing a three-tier local self-government institution which would enable decentralization of administration and democratization of power. The three tiers would be the Panchayat at the village level, the Panchayat Samiti for a group of village with executive powers and Zila Parishad at the district level as the advisory body. The government accepted the²²

recommendations and by 1963 legislations were framed by many states for establishing these Panchayats. The Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) functioned reasonably well during the early sixties, but with the passage of time their functional efficiency began to deteriorate.¹⁶The Panchayat movement in India reached a turning point in 1977 with the constitution of the Ashok Mehta committee. This committee was set up to inquire into the working of the Panchayati Raj institution and to suggest measures to strengthen them so as to enable a decentralized system planning and development to be effective. The Ashok Mehta committee Report (1978) paved way to foundations for second-generation Panchayats.

The Ashok Mehta committee’s Recommendations were:

- Favored two-tier model for Panchayati Raj-Zila parishad & mandal Panchayat.
- Direct elections to these bodies, reservation of constituencies for SC/STs and Women.
- State governments should not supersede the PRIs. All development functions should be put under the Zila Parishad.
- Preparation of exhaustive list of functions based on location-specific programmes.
- PRIs should be allowed to mobilize resources by granting them powers of taxation.
- Improved interface between PRIs, voluntary agencies, cooperatives and local-government institutions for capacity building and human resource development.

Later the, G.V.K. Rao committee was constituted in 1985 for reviewing the administrative arrangements for rural development programmes and poverty alleviation schemes. It agreed that the district should be the basic unit of policy planning and programme implementation, but it emphasized the need for regular election to the panchayats.¹⁷In the terms of reference of committee apart from other issues, one of the important matters was to study the role of Panchayati Raj bodies and their relationship with the proposed administrative set-up and to make appropriate recommendations in this regard with a view to achieve the PRIs. The committee gave several useful suggestions as district being the prime unit for overall planning and development. It suggested strengthening Zila Parishad by introducing a system of sub-committees constituted on the basis of proportional representation. This would encourage and enhance the participatory democracy. Planning, plan-implementation and monitoring of rural development programmes were suggested to be entrusted to the PRIs at the district and lower levels.

It even talked of transferring some of the planning functions at the state level to the district level. In order to appreciate the ideals of participatory democracy, it envisaged the holding of the local elections regularly. On regard to integration of rural development programmes, one of the suggestions of the committee was that Zila Parishad should be the apex body for the overall planning at the district level. It should be assisted by a District Planning Board which should be an advisory expert body with a planning cell. The plan should be prepared by the DPB and sent to Zila Parishad for review and authentication. In the model, all the rural development activities pertaining to the district should be levered under the purview of district body.¹⁸The Government of India set up a committee in June 1986 headed by L.M. Singh to prepare a concept paper on the revitalization of Panchayati Raj Institutions. The Committee recommended to protect the Panchayati Raj institutions by constitution as third tier of government; regular election setting up of Panchayati Raj Judicial Tribunal to adjudicate in respect of elections, suspension, supersession, dissolution etc.; earmarking of adequate financial resources by the central Finance commission; setting up of Nyaya Panchayats; model legislation for appropriate local adoptions; evolving the correct role of political parties through consensus etc.

The commission on Centre-state Relations, Popularly known as Sarkaria commission, set-up by the ministry of home affairs on 9th June 1983, under the chairmanship of R.S Sarkaria also touched the subject of decentralization at lowest level. A sub-committee of the parliamentary consultative committee was set-up in 1988 under the chairmanship of P.K. Thungan to consider „type of political and administrative structure in the district for district planning. The Thungan committee examined the subject in greater detail and suggested a three-tier structure with constitutional status, reservation of seats for scheduled castes, scheduled tribes and women and setting up of finance commission in every state. The committee also suggested that a model Panchayati Raj Act should be enacted by the central Government to maintain uniformity. The village Panchayats was empowered to sort out simple disputes at the village level itself. The team of panchayati raj bodies should be for a period of five years. 1924

DECLINE OF PANCHAYATI RAJ INSTITUTIONS

Many committees and plans were set up to establish a Panchayati Raj in country. These committees and plans had made many efforts for de-centralisation and Panchayati Raj institutions. But all these elaborate programmes did not achieve the desired result. Popular support was lacking. Problems of administration and the proper execution of development programmes were unforeseen. The experience gained in this sphere necessitated a thorough check up of the working of the community development organization consequently the planning commission appointed in 1957 a study team headed by Balvantroy Mehta to suggest remedial measures. The team recommended for the establishment of the Panchayati Raj, (Democratic Decentralisation)- transfer of responsibility for planning and execution of development programmes to the representatives of rural population. They felt that the local interest could only be developed if the people concerned had adequate control over expenditure on their welfare schemes. This was the only way to create local initiative in the field of development. Panchayati Raj was to consist of three tiers of elected and organically linked democratic bodies at the village, block and district levels. The recommendations were further endorsed by the National Development Council in 1958. The real dimensions of India are reflected in the diversity of social structures and thinking. Community development being a social process required local adjustments. The central council of local self-government realized as late as 1959 that though the broad pattern and the fundamentals of the Panchayati Raj structure might be uniform. There would not be any rigidity in the pattern. The genuine transfer of power to the people was what was ultimately important. If this was ensured, form and pattern might necessarily vary according to condition prevailed in different states. The recommendation had broadly

determined the policy of the government of India and the states were left to exercise their autonomy in determining the pattern of Panchayati Raj in their own areas.

Punjab was one of the first few states to establish the panchayati Raj through the enactment of Punjab Panchayat samitis and Zila Parishad Act, 1961. This completed the process of democratizations of local bodies. Universal adult franchise was introduced, special reservations were made of scheduled caste/tribes for a period of ten years to begin with. This period was, however, extended for another ten years to enable them to have their full share in the management of national and civil affairs.

Conclusion

When Punjab was bifurcated in 1966 and Haryana became a separate State, even though Panchayati Raj System existed had not taken deep roots. These institutions did not enjoy much autonomy due to State government's control over them. The panchayats in the State continued to be governed by the Punjab Gram Panchayat Act 1952 and the Punjab Panchayat Samitis and Zila Parishad Act of 1961. The State had a three-tier Panchayat System at the village, intermediate and the district level. However in 1972, the Zila Parishads were abolished. Due to the abolition of the Zila Parishad, the structural and institutional aspects of Panchayats had become weak. As a result the organic link between the village Panchayat and the block Panchayat with that of the district was missing. In due course of time the administration and political apparatus came to dominate their bodies. This resulted in a gradual erosion of the authority and powers of the Panchayats thereby undermining the position of the elected representations. The role of development administration was devalued by tightening of the grip on the bodies of the local elites, bureaucracy and the political leadership. Due to these factors, the very objective of democratization was defeated and the Panchayats in the State remained dormant till the enactment of the 73rd constitutional Amendment Act.

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