



IMPACT OF PANCHAYATHRAJ SYSTEM AFTER 73rd CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENT ACT: A REVIEW

Dr. M. Narsaiah

*Assistant professor(c), Department of Public Administration, Telangana University, Nizamabad
Telangana.*

Abstract

The 73rd Amendment Act institutionalized Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs), decentralizing power to rural local governments, fostering greater citizen participation, and empowering marginalized communities, especially women, through mandatory reservations for Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, and women in all elected bodies. It established a three-tier structure for local governance, defined the responsibilities of the Panchayats, including implementing schemes for economic development and social justice from the Eleventh Schedule, and mandated regular, constitutionally protected elections. While significant progress in local democracy has been achieved, challenges persist, including limited financial autonomy, unclear roles for bureaucracy, and insufficient awareness and infrastructure in some rural areas. The present article is going to discuss the impact of Panchayathraj system after 73rd constitutional amendment act 1992.

Key Words: *73rd Amendment Act, Panchayathraj Institutions, Decentralizing, Citizen Participation, Reservations.*

Introduction

From the time of the freedom struggle to the present day, there has been recognition in India that Panchayat Raj is imperative for both deepening India's democracy and making its development process more inclusive. The aim is to involve the people in the running of their own affairs in their respective neighbourhood communities. It is recognized that Panchayats comprising their own elected representatives, responsible to their own community, would be more likely to respond to the needs and demands of the neighbourhood communities than a distant bureaucracy. The 73rd Amendment Act institutionalized Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs), decentralizing power to rural local governments, fostering greater citizen participation, and empowering marginalized communities, especially women, through mandatory reservations for Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, and women in all elected bodies. It established a three-tier structure for local governance, defined the responsibilities of the Panchayats, including implementing schemes for economic development and social justice from the Eleventh Schedule, and mandated regular, constitutionally protected elections. While significant progress in local democracy has been achieved, challenges persist, including limited financial autonomy, unclear roles for bureaucracy, and insufficient awareness and infrastructure in some rural areas.

Evolution of Panchayati Raj

The Panchayati system in India is not purely a post-independence phenomenon. In fact, the dominant political institution in rural India has been the village panchayat for centuries. In ancient India, panchayats were usually elected councils with executive and judicial powers. Foreign domination, especially Mughal and British, and the natural and forced socio-economic changes had undermined the importance of the village panchayats. In the pre-independence period, however, the panchayats were instruments for the dominance of the upper castes over the rest of the village, which furthered the divide based on either the socio-economic status or the caste hierarchy.



The evolution of the Panchayati Raj System, however, got a fillip after the attainment of independence after the drafting of the Constitution. The Constitution of India in Article 40 enjoined: "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".

There were a number of committees appointed by the Government of India to study the implementation of self-government at the rural level and also recommend steps in achieving this goal.

The Committees appointed are as follows

1. Balwant Rai Mehta Committee.
2. Ashok Mehta Committee.
3. G V K Rao Committee.
4. L M Singhvi Committee.

L M Singhvi Committee & Panchayati Raj

The committee was appointed by the Government of India in 1986 with the main objective to recommend steps to revitalise the Panchayati Raj systems for democracy and development.

The following recommendations were made by the Committee

1. The committee recommended that the Panchayati Raj systems should be constitutionally recognised. It also recommended constitutional provisions to recognise free and fair elections for the Panchayati Raj systems.
2. The committee recommended reorganisation of villages to make the gram panchayat more viable.
3. It recommended that village panchayats should have more finances for their activities.
4. Judicial tribunals to be set up in each state to adjudicate matters relating to the elections to the Panchayati Raj institutions and other matters relating to their functioning.

All these things further the argument that panchayats can be very effective in identifying and solving local problems, involve the people in the villages in the developmental activities, improve the communication between different levels at which politics operates, develop leadership skills and in short help the basic development in the states without making too many structural changes. Rajasthan and Andhra Pradesh were the first to adopt Panchayati raj in 1959, other states followed them later.

Though there are variations among states, there are some features that are common. In most of the states, for example, a three-tier structure including panchayats at the village level, panchayat samitis at the block level and the zila parishads at the district level has been institutionalized. Due to the sustained effort of the civil society organisations, intellectuals and progressive political leaders, the Parliament passed two amendments to the Constitution – the 73rd Constitution Amendment for rural local bodies (panchayats) and the 74th Constitution Amendment for urban local bodies (municipalities) making them 'institutions of self-government'. Within a year all the states passed their own acts in conformity to the amended constitutional provisions.

73rd Constitutional Amendment Act of 1992

The 73rd Constitutional Amendment was a significant step in establishing a strong framework for local governance in India. Enacted on April 24, 1993, this amendment gave constitutional status to the Panchayati Raj institutions. It aimed to empower local self-governments in rural areas, ensuring that they could function effectively and independently.



Significance of the Act

1. The Act added Part IX to the Constitution, “The Panchayats” and also added the Eleventh Schedule which consists of the 29 functional items of the panchayats.
2. Part IX of the Constitution contains Article 243 to Article 243 O.
3. The Amendment Act provides shape to Article 40 of the Constitution, (directive principles of state policy), which directs the state to organise the village panchayats and provide them powers and authority so that they can function as self-government.
4. With the Act, Panchayati Raj systems come under the purview of the justiciable part of the Constitution and mandates states to adopt the system. Further, the election process in the Panchayati Raj institutions will be held independent of the state government’s will.
5. The Act has two parts: compulsory and voluntary. Compulsory provisions must be added to state laws, which include the creation of the new Panchayati Raj systems. Voluntary provisions, on the other hand, are the discretion of the state government.
6. The Act is a very significant step in creating democratic institutions at the grassroots level in the country. The Act has transformed the representative democracy into participatory democracy.

Key Provisions and Articles

The amendment includes several key provisions:

1. Three-tier system: It established a three-tier system of governance, consisting of Gram Panchayat (village level), Panchayat Samiti (block level), and Zila Parishad (district level).
2. Elections: Elections for these bodies must be held every five years.
3. Reservation of seats: It mandates the reservation of seats for Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, and women, ensuring representation for marginalized groups.

Role of State Governments

State governments play a crucial role in implementing the provisions of the 73rd Amendment. They are responsible for:

1. Conducting elections for the Panchayati Raj institutions.
2. Establishing State Finance Commissions to recommend financial powers for the Panchayats.
3. Ensuring compliance with the constitutional provisions regarding the structure and functioning of these institutions.

The 73rd Amendment was a landmark change, marking a shift towards democratic decentralization in India.

This framework has been instrumental in promoting local governance and empowering rural communities, making them active participants in their own development.

Structure and Organization of Panchayati Raj Institutions

Three-Tier System

The Panchayati Raj system in India is structured into three main levels:

1. Gram Panchayat (village level).
2. Panchayat Samiti (block level).
3. Zilla Panchayat (district level).

This three-tier system allows for effective local governance and ensures that decisions are made closer to the people.



Roles and Responsibilities

Each level of the Panchayati Raj has specific roles:

1. Gram Panchayat: Responsible for local development and welfare activities in the village.
2. Panchayat Samiti: Coordinates between multiple Gram Panchayats and oversees block-level development.
3. Zilla Panchayat: Focuses on district-wide planning and implementation of development programs.

Election and Tenure

Elections for all levels of Panchayati Raj institutions are held every five years. The State Election Commission conducts these elections, ensuring a democratic process. Each member is elected directly by the local population, promoting participation in governance.

The Ministry of Panchayati Raj oversees all matters related to Panchayati Raj institutions, ensuring they function effectively and serve the community's needs.

Functions and Responsibilities of Panchayati Raj Institutions

Economic Development Initiatives

Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) play a crucial role in promoting economic development at the grassroots level. They are responsible for:

1. Implementing local development projects.
2. Managing funds for community welfare.
3. Promoting self-employment and skill development programs.

These initiatives aim to uplift the economic status of rural communities.

Social Justice and Welfare Programs

PRIs are also tasked with ensuring social justice and welfare. Their responsibilities include:

1. Implementing government welfare schemes for marginalized groups.
2. Facilitating access to education and healthcare services.
3. Promoting gender equality and women's empowerment.

Infrastructure and Public Services

Another key function of PRIs is to oversee the development of infrastructure and public services. This includes:

1. Maintaining local roads, sanitation, and water supply.
2. Ensuring the availability of public health services.
3. Supporting educational institutions in rural areas.

PRIs are essential for fostering community participation and ensuring that local needs are met effectively.

| Function | Description |
|----------------------|--|
| Economic Development | Local projects and self-employment initiatives |
| Social Justice | Welfare schemes and access to services |



| Function | Description |
|----------------------------|--|
| Infrastructure Development | Maintenance of roads, sanitation, and health |

In summary, the Panchayati Raj Institutions are vital for the decentralization of power, enabling local governance to address the unique needs of rural communities effectively.

Role of Panchayati Raj in Rural Development

Agricultural and Allied Activities

Panchayati Raj institutions play a crucial role in promoting agriculture and related activities in rural areas. They help in:

1. Providing training and resources to farmers.
2. Facilitating access to credit and subsidies.
3. Implementing agricultural development programs.

These initiatives aim to enhance productivity and ensure food security.

Education and Health Services

Panchayati Raj institutions are also responsible for improving education and health services in villages. Their efforts include:

1. Establishing schools and health centers.
2. Organizing health camps and awareness programs.
3. Ensuring the availability of essential medicines and educational materials.

Women and Child Development

The empowerment of women and children is a significant focus of Panchayati Raj. They work towards:

1. Promoting women's self-help groups.
2. Implementing schemes for child nutrition and education.
3. Addressing issues like child marriage and domestic violence.

Challenges and Issues in Panchayati Raj System

The Panchayati Raj system in India faces several significant challenges that hinder its effectiveness. These challenges can impact the overall governance and development in rural areas.

Financial Constraints

Many Panchayati Raj institutions struggle with financial limitations. They often rely heavily on state and central government grants, which can be inconsistent. This leads to:

1. Inability to fund local projects.
2. Delays in implementing development schemes.
3. Limited resources for community welfare programs.

Administrative Hurdles

Administrative issues also pose a challenge. These include:

1. Lack of trained personnel.
2. Inefficient bureaucratic processes.
3. Poor communication between different levels of government.



Political Interference

Political interference can undermine the autonomy of Panchayati Raj institutions. This often results in:

1. Decisions being influenced by local political leaders rather than community needs.
2. Elected representatives prioritizing personal or party agendas over public welfare.
3. A decrease in public trust in local governance.

The need for capacity building and training of elected representatives and officials is crucial for improving the effectiveness of the Panchayati Raj system.

Model Villages and Best Practices

In various parts of India, model villages have emerged as shining examples of effective governance through the Panchayati Raj system. These villages showcase how local self-governance can lead to significant improvements in living standards. One notable example is Bakaram Jagir Gram Panchayat in Rangareddy district, Telangana, where the local panchayat successfully managed rural water supply and sanitation. This initiative not only improved access to clean water but also enhanced community health and hygiene.

Innovative Schemes and Programs

Several innovative programs have been launched under the Panchayati Raj system to address local issues. Some of these include:

1. Self-Help Groups (SHGs): Empowering women by providing them with financial independence.
2. Skill Development Initiatives: Training youth in various trades to enhance employability.
3. Community Health Programs: Focusing on maternal and child health to reduce mortality rates.

Community Participation and Empowerment

Community involvement is crucial for the success of Panchayati Raj institutions. In many villages, residents actively participate in decision-making processes, leading to better outcomes. For instance, in Bakaram Jagir, the community's engagement in planning and executing projects has fostered a sense of ownership and responsibility among the villagers. This has resulted in sustainable development and improved local governance.

The success of the Panchayati Raj system lies in its ability to empower local communities, enabling them to take charge of their development and well-being.

Impact of Panchayati Raj on Local Governance

Decentralization of Power

The Panchayati Raj system has significantly contributed to the decentralization of power in rural India. This system allows local self-governments to make decisions that directly affect their communities. By empowering local bodies, it ensures that the voices of villagers are heard and considered in governance.

Transparency and Accountability

Panchayati Raj institutions promote transparency and accountability in local governance. They are required to maintain records and conduct regular meetings, which helps in:

1. Encouraging public participation in decision-making.
2. Ensuring that funds are used effectively for community development.
3. Holding elected representatives accountable for their actions.



Citizen Engagement

The system fosters greater citizen engagement in governance. Villagers can now:

1. Participate in Gram Sabhas (village assemblies) to discuss local issues.
2. Vote in regular elections to choose their representatives.
3. Voice their concerns regarding local development projects.

The Panchayati Raj system is a vital step towards empowering rural communities and enhancing their role in governance.

Policy Recommendations

To enhance the effectiveness of the Panchayati Raj system, several policy recommendations can be made:

1. Strengthening local governance through better training for elected representatives.
2. Increasing financial support to ensure that Panchayati Raj institutions can function effectively.
3. Promoting community participation in decision-making processes.

Technological Integration

The integration of technology can significantly improve the functioning of Panchayati Raj institutions. Some potential areas include:

1. E-governance to streamline processes and improve transparency.
2. Use of mobile applications for better communication between citizens and local bodies.
3. Online platforms for public feedback on local governance issues.

Strengthening Local Governance

To ensure that Panchayati Raj institutions are truly effective, it is essential to:

1. Empower Gram Sabhas to take charge of local development plans.
2. Ensure regular elections to maintain democratic processes.
3. Address the financial constraints faced by these institutions.

The future of Panchayati Raj hinges on empowering communities and ensuring that local governance is both effective and inclusive. Community-led governance is vital for sustainable development.

Conclusion

In summary, the Panchayati Raj system plays a vital role in empowering local communities in rural India. By allowing villagers to participate in decision-making, this system helps address local issues more effectively. It promotes accountability and transparency, ensuring that the needs of the people are met. The success of Panchayati Raj depends on active participation from the community and support from the government. As India continues to grow, strengthening this system will be essential for sustainable development and improving the quality of life in rural areas. The 73rd Constitutional Amendment established Panchayati Raj, fostering grassroots democracy with over 260,000 local bodies and 3.1 million representatives, including 1.4 million women. Despite progress in representation, challenges persist: limited devolution of powers, financial dependence, bureaucratic dominance, and weak institutional capacity. Strengthening fiscal autonomy, devolving functions, and empowering Panchayats are essential for effective local governance and inclusive development. Currently moving towards completing 30 years there is a need to set in motion a new set of reforms. The time has come to move from political representation to power devolution. There is a need for the state political leadership to accept the importance of PRIs, and devolve power to them as mandated by the Constitution of India. Building the capacities of PRIs not as mere implementers of projects but as planners and evaluators would help strengthen the institution.



There is also a need for elected local leaders to come together with their constituents, and demand more control and autonomy as enshrined to them by the Constitution of India.

References

1. Aiyar, Mani Shankar. 2014. Inclusive Governance for Inclusive Development: The History, Politics and Economics of Panchayat Raj. Chapter 4 in J.P. Faguet and C. Pöschl (eds.). 2015. Is Decentralization Good for Development? Perspectives from Academics and Policy Makers. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
2. Basic Statistics of Panchayati Raj Institutions, 2019, Ministry of Panchayati Raj, New Delhi.
3. .Gandhi, M., & Vyas, H. (1962). Village Swaraj: Navajivan Publishing House.
4. Goel, S. R. S. (2009). Panchayati Raj in India: Theory & Practice (2nd Rev. & Enlg: Deep and Deep Publications.
5. Gupta, Manish and Chakraborty, Pinaki. April, 2019. State Finance Commissions: How successful have they been in Empowering Local Governments?. NIPFP, No. 263: New Delhi.
6. Jain, S. C. (1967). Community Development and Panchayati Raj in India. New Delhi: Allied Publishers.
7. Kashyap, A. (1989). Panchayati Raj. Views of our Founding Fathers and Recommendations of Different Committees. New Delhi: Lancer Books.
8. Kohli, Atul. 1987. The State and Poverty in India: The Politics of Reform, Cambridge, U.K., Cambridge University Press.
9. Kulke, Hermann and Rothermund, Dietmar (2006). A History of India, Routledge, London.
- Mathew, G. (1994). Panchayati Raj from Legislation to Movement: Concept Publishing Company
10. Mathew, G. (1995). Status of Panchayati Raj in the States of India, 1994. New Delhi: Institute of Social Sciences.
11. Mohanty, Meera, "Devolution of power to sarpanchs ineffective in practice: CAG", Economic Times, May 14, 2020, Bhubaneswar.
12. Rao, S. (1967). The framing of India's Constitution. Select documents: 1946 – 1947. New Delhi: Indian Inst. of Public Administration.