

Study on Evolution of Panchayati Raj Institutions in India

¹Marium Reza and ²Dr. Rafat Afroz Khan

¹Research Scholar, Department of Political Science, Sri Satya Sai University of Technology & Medical Sciences, Sehore, M.P.

²Research Guide, Department of Political Science, Sri Satya Sai University of Technology & Medical Sciences, Sehore, M.P.

ARTICLE DETAILS

Article History

Published Online: 25 May 2019

Keywords

panchayati raj, regulation, self-governing, protection.

ABSTRACT

India is rightly regarded as the land of villages. In a country where seventy-five percent of the population dwells in over five lakh seventy-five thousand villages, the importance of Local Government, popularly known as Panchayati Raj in India, looks self-evident. Indeed, thoughts on Local Government are but part of the larger concern for social and economic amelioration of the people, a task to which India is committed. Panchayats have been amongst the oldest political institutions of India, and the very use of this term has deeply nostalgic association tending to take the mind to the distant and dim past. But in the form in which it is constituted and made to function today is a modern innovation. Community Development Programme was inaugurated on 2nd October 1952 in the country to synchronise the programme with the birth anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi, to whom the rural amelioration was dearer.

Evolution of Panchayati Raj Institutions in India

The beginning of Panchayat system is to be found in the principle of taxation for local purposes. This principle is embodied in Regulation 13 of 1813 which says that those who congregate together for any purpose and thereby make it necessary to make special arrangements for the protection of their life and property must pay for the maintenance of police. The Regulation also laid down that the Magistrate should constitute a Panchayat consisting of one or two members elected by the inhabitants of the concerned locality. The Panchayat had power to appoint and control the Chowkidari and to levy and collect taxes for the payment of their salaries. The number of Chowkidars that could be employed was two for every fifty houses at a monthly salary of Rs.3.00. The maximum of tax that could be levied was annas two on each house.

Starting from the Vedic period to the end of the British Rule almost every village in the country had a self-governing body of its own. It has been observed by historical research that the "Local Self Government in ancient India was far more widespread, more real and more successful than in the days of British Rule or even at present". This inference clearly shows that in the ancient times, the people had enjoyed the advantages of these institutions.

The environmental conditions existing in those days were favourable to the Panchayats to function freely and without interferences from the Central or Provincial Governments because the control and authority exercised by the Government over the village affairs were minimal. The Government works were within the purview of the village and the village authorities had the power to execute these works. The entrusted functions like defense, the preservation of order, the settlement of disputes, the collection of revenue maintenance of roads, financial relief, health etc., were under the control of Village Assemblies. The small amount of control exercised over the village authorities by the Central and Provincial Governments was partly due to the ancient conception of the state and its relation to society and partly of the economic conditions of those days.

The Self Government was more real in those days and the evidences available support this fact. The village assemblies consisted either of all the heads of households or of all adults. There was no question of who should or should not have the vote. The assembly or 'Mahasabha' operated through a variety of Committees and there were prescribed rules of debate and voting at the meetings of the General Assembly and the Committees. This clearly shows that "the present system of Government based on democratic principles owes its genesis to ancient village republics. Nothing could be more democratic than this. In conformity with this, the assemblies had adequate finances to administer the numerous services and to undertake development works. The taxes were collected in the form of cash and or in kind. The available resources were utilised through effective devices'

The homogenous and integrated character of the society that existed in the past was responsible for the successful working of Panchayat's. And also community spirit prevailed among the inhabitants of the village, and this strengthened and boosted the morale of these institutions. There was no room for personal or group rivalries and the administration of these assemblies went on quite smoothly and this resulted in giving effective and efficient administration to the village as a whole. It has been observed that the "Success of Governmental system depends not only on the kind of institutional machinery set up, but also on the public spirit. The honesty, the efficiency and the sense of responsibility of men in charge of machinery. All these qualities were deep rooted in those who handle the machinery of Local Self Government in the past. It was the great merit of a society based on immemorial customs and tradition."

The Institutions started with the coming of Mughals the period of anarchy following the collapse of this dynasty and, the advent of establishment and consolidation of British Rule in India. The old system gradually started losing its grips with the interference of Central Government in its affairs. "The Mughals had interfered very little with the ancient customs of village Government. They incorporated the village into the administration as a Unit for revenue and police purposes only. The state dealt through the headman or muquaddani who was

held responsible for the maintenance of law and order and the restitution of theft within the areas of his authority. The judicial powers of the village council, the Panchayat, were considerably curtailed under the Mughals, otherwise local affairs remained unregulated from above and the village officer's and servants were answerable primarily to the Panchayat.

In spite of democratic nature of the village administration, the villages during the Mughal period were controlled by strong headman and it was the rule of one man. The Panchayat was not fully representative in character. "Most of its members were drawn from the members of the founding families, or from the Brahmins and superior cultivators. The menials and landless men had almost no say in its affairs. But, in some parts of South India these Institutions were often made up of a representative of each of the Constituent Communities of the village including the Sudras. The Panchayati supervised almost all the affairs of the village, decided disputes and apportioned taxes. "They were conservative bodies often dialatory unenterprising and far from impartial and their deliberations had the great weight of religion and custom" in the Panchayat is God".

The Panchayat did not have any universality during the Mughal period because mostly villages were ruled by landlords or their agents exercising Quasi-Federal authority. This was also prevalent in so-called ryothwari provinces. The democratic functioning was totally absent in the village Government and even then there was a sense of participation among villagers in the Panchayat affairs. The old Panchayat whether as a caste tribunal or as a judicial or administrative body, normally conducted its deliberations in the presence of all who cared to attend.

The same dismal feature continued with the establishment of British Rule in India. Panchayats were given least importance in the administration, which in turn led to the disruption in the village community life. Slowly, these institutions started losing their self-government character which was the features of the ancient village government system and led to near extension. The state authority can introduce special programmes like construction and maintenance of irrigation works, relief works, the laying of roads and the payment of grant-in-aid to schools were implemented by the State. A new judicial system was introduced under which disputes were carried for settlement to courts outside the village. The introduction of new educational system encouraged the migration of men for villages to towns which in turn drained rural areas of enlightened leadership".

In 1856, this Regulation was replaced by Act, which authorised the government to extend the Chowkidar system any town suburb or bazar in which there was a police station under an officer of the rank of a Jamedar, The Government also authorised to create unions by combining two or more towns for the purpose of the Act. As regards as the mode of taxation, it was either an assessment according to circumstances or a rate on the basis of annual rental value of houses and grounds. The government determined the mode of taxation. The maximum assessment on any individual should not exceed the pay of a Chowkidari's of lowest grade. The power of appoint of Chowkidari was taken away from the Panchayat and vested in the Magistrate, thus asserting principles of that government should have the power to control

the police of urban areas, even though it was paid for by the local bodies".

After 1857, rural self-government received some importance and funds were set up in a few states and were given power to levy a cess on land revenue, education and road ceases. District and Taluk local fund committees were set up as advisory bodies and they were nothing more than convenience for a District Magistrate to supply him with information on to carry out miscellaneous duties. Moreover, the funds available were so small that no proper public services were possible. And the village was hardly touched by the new district committees.

In 1870, India saw the dawn of representative local institutions. A significant impetus to the development of local governments both at the rural and urban, was given by Mayo's Resolution 1870. The primary object of the resolution was to enlarge the powers and responsibilities of the governments and presidencies and provinces in respect of the public expenditure in some of the civil departments like roads, education, medical services, civil works, police etc. It also afforded opportunities for the development of self-government to harness social interest, supervision and care for the management of funds devoted to education, sanitation, health services and local public works.

From the year 1882 opened a new Chapter in the growth of local self-government, the resolution of Lord Rippon, who was regarded as the father of local self-government in India had the object of affording further practical development to the intentions of Lord Mayo's Government. The major recommendations of the resolution were: Political education is the primary function of local government of greater importance than administrative efficiency. Rural boards are to be setup, similar to municipal boards; the unit of administration to be small the subdivision, tehsil or taluka. All the boards should contain a two-third majority of non-officials; these should be elected whenever possible. The Chairman of the local boards should be accordingly be non-officials whenever possible.

The Resolutions of 1882 were not encouraging and the progress towards the establishment of local self-government institution of the type envisaged by the resolution was slow, uneven and at times marked by setbacks. There was no seriousness among the government of the Provinces in following the resolution. A noble development in 1884, however, was the Constitution of "Union Panchayats in Madras and Bengal with jurisdiction over a group of villages. Despite the efforts made by the Rippon Resolution to establish grass-root level institution, the overall result was rather disappointing. The factors responsible for this kind of development were the autocratic tradition of the bureaucracy and the relative backwardness and apathy of the grass roots elite. In spite, of this address attitudes, the idea was inspiring and it caught on.

Strengthening of local self-government institution received further step with the appointment of the Royal Commission on decentralization in 1907 headed by C.E.H. Hobhouse. The Commission sought public opinion about the steps to be taken for the resuscitation of the age old institution of Village Panchayats. The Commission viewed that the local self-government should commence in the village level instead of from the district level. It stated "We consider, as the local self-government should commence in the villages with the establishment of village panchayats, so the next step be the

constitution of boards of areas of smaller size than district. We desire, therefore, to see sub district boards, universally established as the principal agencies of rural administration". District boards were retained with coordinating with the financial powers. The Commission recommended to grant some powers to Panchayats so that they can perform their duties independently.

The Commission suggested to entrust the functions like village sanitation, control over the ponds and management of schools and there should be adequate finance to cope up with the above functions. It also suggested that the Panchayats should be empowered to have a portion of the land cess, receipts from markets, fees on civil suits and special grants from particular objects to be made by the district board.

References

1. Arora, R.C., Integrated Rural Development, S.Chand & Co., New Delhi, 1979.
2. Ashok Chandra, Indian Administration, Allen and Unwin, London, 1967.
3. Bajaj, J.L., and Sastri G., Rural Poverty: Issues and Options. Print House, 1985.
4. Battacharya M., Rural Self Government in Metropolitan Calcutta, Asia Publishing House, Bombay, 1965.
5. Bhargava, B.S., Panchavati Rai System and Political Parties. Ashish Publishing House, New Delhi, 1979.
6. Bhargava B.S., Rama Rao S., Indian Local Government: A Study (Minerva Associates Private Limited, Calcutta, 1978.
7. Bhargava B.S., Panchayati Raj Institution: An Analysis of Issues. Problems. Ashok Mehta Committee. Ashish Publishing House, New Delhi, 1985.