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**Panchayati Raj :
Empowering Democracy**

Green India Mission

The National Mission for a Green India (GIM) coming under the Ministry of Environment & Forests has recently approved the annual plans for Kerala, Mizoram, Manipur and Jharkhand. GIM, which is one of the eight missions outlined under National Action Plan on Climate Change (NAPCC) acknowledges the influence forest cover has on environmental amelioration through climate change mitigation, food security, water security, bio-diversity conservation and livelihood security of forest dependent communities in India.



The National Executive Council of the Mission which met recently has approved the plan for the above four states with a combined outlay of Rs 90,202 lakhs. The total forest and non-forest area taken up in the four states under GIM during the plan period will be 1,08,335 hectares. Out of this 81.939 hectares will be improving density of existing forest and 16,396 hectares will be new areas.

The Mission also envisages a holistic view of greening and preserving mangroves, wetlands, critical habitats etc. along with carbon sequestration as a co-benefit. This mission has adopted an integrated cross-sectoral approach as it will be implemented on both public as well as private lands with a key role of the local communities in planning, decision making, implementation and monitoring.

Mission Goals

To increase forest/tree cover to the extent of 5 million hectares (mha) and improve quality of forest/tree cover on another 5 mha of forest/non-forest lands;

To improve/enhance eco-system services like carbon sequestration and storage (in forests and other ecosystems), hydrological services and biodiversity; along with provisioning services like fuel, fodder, and timber and non-timber forest products (NTFPs); and To increase forest based livelihood income of about three million households.

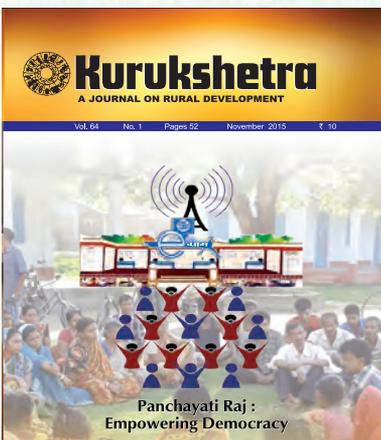
Convergence

Green India Mission hinges upon convergence with related Missions of the National Action Plan on Climate Change, other complementary National Mission Programmes and schemes for better coordination in developing forests and their fringe areas in a holistic and sustainable manner. The coherent approach involving contribution from converging partners intends to saturate the landscapes with essential need-based interventions at a faster pace. Also the convergence aims at optimizing efficient use of resources and avoidance of contrast activities which can disturb the balance in the ecosystem due to lack of coordination between different schemes.



As a first step towards translation of these efforts into action, Green India mission has issued the Convergence Guidelines of GIM with MGNREGAS. Efforts are on to finalize convergence guidelines with other complimentary schemes to set out the approach for coordination at field level.

Convergence guidelines of GIM with CAMPA have been framed to ensure a synergized approach which is required to address the challenges being faced in environment, forest and wildlife sector thereby contributing to ecological security in the context of climate change.



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Editorial

India as one of the largest and most vibrant democracies in the world enjoys a unique place among the comity of nations. As a nation, we have every reason to be proud of the fact that despite tremendous socio-economic challenges, our democratic system has emerged from strength to strength over the last 68 years and the rest of the world look upon India with admiration for its democratic values. Proving the critics wrong, we have further consolidated our unity in diversity over the years. In fact, for the newly emerging nations, India has become a role model as a powerful and meaningful democracy. As we salute the founding fathers of our nation for the tremendous wisdom and foresight in laying down the guiding principles, we have equal responsibility to march ahead in the right path of democracy based on inclusiveness.

The world famous definition of democracy, “Government of the people, by the people, for the people” becomes meaningful when democratic practices actually percolate to the grassroots level. The emergence and evolution of Panchayati Raj system in India has in fact paved the way for further strengthening our democratic roots. Needless to say, decentralization is the key to attain better economic efficiency, accountability and overall socio-economic development with equitable distribution of income and wealth.

After the 73rd amendment of Indian Constitution, two decades of Panchayati Raj system in India has brought about tangible improvements in our democratic system at the grassroots level. Thirty three per cent reservation for women, 50 per cent in some states, has empowered the women folk of India considerably in exercising their legitimate right in participatory democracy. Empowering the gram sabhas should be the guiding principle to ensure meaningful democracy. It is indeed heartening to note that many states like Bihar, Himachal Pradesh, Karnataka, Maharashtra and Kerala have made noteworthy initiatives in infusing further energy into the Panchayati Raj system. In Kerala, more than one-third of the state’s planned resources are devolved to the local government institutions. Fiscal decentralisation is the key feature of Panchayati Raj in the state. In Himachal Pradesh, more than 57 per cent women occupy reservation in the three tier Panchayati Raj Institutions. Uttarakhand, Tripura, Madhya Pradesh, Kerala, Maharashtra and Rajasthan enjoy the reputation of 50 per cent reservation for women in Panchayats.

The Centre has recently initiated a number of steps to strengthen the Panchayati Raj Institutions across the country. Sanctioning of thousands of personnel at the gram panchayat level, construction of new Panchayat Bhawans, provision of computers and other IT enabled tools even in the nook and corner of the country is transforming the face of PRIs in India. To address regional developmental imbalances Backward Regions Grant Fund Programme (BRGF) provides funds to 272 backward districts in the country. E-Panchayat project is also providing further fillip to planning, implementation, budgeting, monitoring and delivery of services to the people.

At the same time, Panchayati Raj Institutions still need enhanced participation from women, socially backward sections and educated and enlightened citizens. Then only democracy becomes “For the People, of the people and by the people” in letter and spirit. □

PANCHAYATI RAJ IN INDIA: DEEPENING GRASSROOT DEMOCRACY

Dr. Mahi Pal

Two decades have elapsed since the enactment of the 73rd Amendment to the Constitution (hereafter referred to Central Act) and more than 15 years have passed since the enactment of the (Provisions of Panchayats (Extension to Scheduled Areas) Act 1996 (hereafter referred to Extension Act). The main purpose of these Acts was to strengthen the Panchayati Raj System (PRS) in the country. This article analysis to what extent these institutions have emerged as institutions of self-governments, enabled people's participation—particularly vulnerable sections like Scheduled Castes (SCs), Scheduled Tribes (STs) and women in these institutions.

Emergence of Local Self –Governments

Central Act has both mandatory and enabling provisions. The state governments were supposed to devolve the functions, finance and functionaries pertaining to 29 subjects listed in the Eleventh Schedule of the Constitution to the Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) to enable these bodies to function as institutions of self government. In order to function, panchayats as institution of self-government (ISG), the Panchayats have to fulfil three basic conditions, namely, (a) institutional existence in the sense that the decisions are taken by the people's representatives, (b) institutional capacity, which means that these institutions have clearly defined functions, functionaries



and finances. Let us see as to what extent the Panchayats have emerged as ISG after evaluating the progress made towards empowering these bodies in last two decades.

The Ministry of Panchayati Raj has been undertaking the preparation of a devolution index from 2006 onwards through independent institutions. For the year 2014-15, the Ministry entrusted this task to the Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS). The main features of this exercise is that it is based both on examining activity, mapping, covering the transfer of functions, functionaries and finances to PRIs in the subject listed in the 11th Schedule of the Constitution and grassroots reality based on the ground situation in few Panchayats in each tier (Gram Panchayat, Panchayat Samiti and Zilla Panchayat) across the states to see the extent of powers they actually exercise at their levels. All the states except Mizoram, Meghalaya, Nagaland and Goa are covered under the study. A total sample of 41 DPs, 39 PSs and 42 GPs have been taken for the field study.

Table 1 presents the index of devolution in policy (DPo) and index of devolution in practice (DPr) across the states. DPo reflects the state governments policy commitment to devolve powers to the Panchayats. It therefore includes functions, functionaries and finances officially allocated to the Panchayats and the infrastructure and governance structure created for the smooth functioning of Panchayat operations. The DPr reflects actual devolution happening in the field and validate the data obtained from the state governments. This indicator shows actual control of Panchayats over transferred institutions, functions, functionaries, financial autonomy and utilisation of developmental funds and the status of infrastructure and administrative systems in place.

Table 1 Ranking of states according to Index of Devolution in Policy (DPo) and Index of Devolution in Practice (DPr)

S No.	States	Policy Index	DPo Rank	Practice Index	DPr Rank
1	Kerala	0.75	1	0.79	1
2	Karnataka	0.58	2	0.52	3
3	Maharashtra	0.57	3	0.49	4
4	Sikkim	0.57	4	0.55	2
5	West Bengal	0.49	5	0.44	8
6	Tamil Nadu	0.48	6	0.37	15
7	Rajasthan	0.47	7	0.38	14
8	Madhya Pradesh	0.42	8	0.43	9
9	Odisha	0.41	9	0.39	12
10	Himachal Pradesh	0.41	10	0.45	5
11	Manipur	0.40	11	0.25	23
12	Chhattisgarh	0.40	12	0.39	13
13	Telangana	0.37	13	0.34	17
14	Andhara Pradesh	0.36	14	0.30	20
15	Punjab	0.35	15	0.30	19
16	Gujarat	0.34	16	0.40	11
17	tripura	0.34	17	0.44	7
18	Uttar Pradesh	0.33	18	0.32	18
19	Jharkhand	0.32	19	0.27	21
20	Haryana	0.31	20	0.37	16
21	Uttarakhand	0.30	21	0.42	10
22	Assam	0.29	22	0.45	6
23	Bihar	0.29	23	0.26	22
24	J & K	0.22	24	0.18	25
25	Arunachal Pradesh	0.19	25	0.24	24

Source : Devolution Report -2014-15, Ministry of Panchayati Raj.



It may be seen from the table that from the point of view of DPo states like Kerala, Karnataka, Maharashtra and Sikkim and West Bengal are the

better performers. Whereas, the performance of Arunachal Pradesh, Jammu & Kashmir, Bihar, Assam and Uttarakhand are poor. From the point of view of DPr the table shows that Kerala stands out as the top performing state in this index. It means there is no difference between policy and its translation in the field from the point of view of decentralization, whereas in other states, positions are different. Though there are difference in ranks, a comparison of the relative position of states in two indices show broad concordance. However, some states like Assam, Uttarakhand, Tripura, Himachal Pradesh, Gujarat and Haryana which have performed poorly or moderately poor in the DPo have improved their performance in DPr.

From the above analysis, it can be said that none of the states have achieved 100 per cent devolution. Kerala, which tops the list, has an index of less than 80. From the point of view of DPr which shows actual happening of decentralisation, as much as 92 per cent of the states have not crossed the devolution index of 50. It shows apathy of political leaders and bureaucrats and what the Report of the Asoka Mehta Committee observed in late seventies that the PRIs had failed in their objectives on account of unfavourable political environment. It also appears correct from the study conducted by TISS. Besides, there is no pressure from the Panchayats on these leaders to devolve powers to them, as no demands have been made from the elected representatives. Whatever is being done in the name of Panchayati Raj is supply driven instead of demand driven.

Extension Act

The Extension Act has not only made the *Gram Sabha* a strong body, but has also put '*jal, jungle and jamin*' (water, forest and land) under its control. Panchayats are expected to take the approval of the *Gram Sabha* in matters relating to rural economy.

But the sidelights of field studies revealed that states have not gone into the spirit of the legislation and have tried to manipulate the provisions in a narrow way. On behalf of the Ministry of Panchayati Raj, IRMA had carried out an independent assessment of the functioning of the Panchayats across the states. Some of the states which comes under 5th Scheduled Areas (where Extension Act is applicable) have also been covered. Assessment revealed that in case of Andhra Pradesh, although several

mandatory provisions of the Extension Act have been incorporated in the state Acts, actual implementation is lacking. In case of Himachal Pradesh, in practice, most of the functions are handled by the states. In some states like Chhattisgarh some of the provisions such as enforcement prohibition, control over money lending are not clearly stated. In Rajasthan, conditions have not been created in the tribal areas to give effect of provisions of the Extension Act at the ground level.

Marginalised Groups and Women

Reservations for SCs, STs and women have been provided in the Panchayats for membership and chairpersonship across the country. As a result of this provision, more than six lakh SCs/STs and more than 10 lakh women have been holding the offices of the members and chairpersons at different tiers of the Panchayats. Lets see how these categories have functioned as members and chairpersons in the Panchayats at different levels.

The findings of a study of the working of Panchayats in six states conducted by PRIA revealed that 25 per cent women notice and remark on the visible change in their status within their family after they have been elected, about 60 per cent of women said that they would encourage other women to contest elections. The same percentage (60 per cent) is contemplating to contest PRI elections again.

It is also worth mentioning that representatives from SC/ST communities and women have faced several problems in discharging their duties. **The State of Panchayats Report 2008-09, an independent assessment done by IRMA says that sample data on proxy representation revealed that about 59 per cent of elected SC/ST women were proxy representatives, of which about one-fifth were proxies for their husbands and /or male relatives. One third were proxies for dominant castes and about one-tenth for others including political parties.**

Many studies and surveys have indicated that participation by SC and ST representatives in decision-making on both governance and developmental issues remained low. Studies also show that over the three Panchayat elections, representatives of the SC community have used the space and have articulated their voice. The wider political mobilization of SC has no doubt been a supportive factor, but there are a

number of instances of SCs collectively claiming their rights to access services and entitlements to resources. Their strategies have engaged with line departments for accessing services and ensured responsiveness of the Panchayats.

At the same time, some of the studies have revealed the other side of the phenomenon. For example, a recent study of 200 women from SC and ST representatives in Gujarat and Tamil Nadu found that only of women chairpersons/presidents were able to discharge their official duties with any freedom and independence. Only 35.3 % of them called panchayat meetings, 31.9 % chaired them, and 27.7 % voluntarily signed resolutions. Only 26.15 % of women presidents voluntarily authorized panchayat payments, monitored the panchayat administration and supervised the work of district and sub-district officials as expected of their roles at intermediate and district levels, and only 23.5 % approved contracts for panchayat development works or reviewed them. Instead, a number of women spoke of rubber-stamping panchayat decisions and signing cheques at the behest of others.

In fact, caste prejudices emerged as a major problem in the functioning of the Panchayats. This is due to unwillingness and grouse the dominant castes hold for having themselves become ineligible to share the powers and control they have long been used to in the PRIs, on account of constitutional provisions for the marginalized group. Due to the prevailing strangle-hold of the caste structure in rural society in the country, neither the respect for the office of elected representatives nor the simple social values of giving equal regard to fellow human-beings, impel the fellow villagers and the fellow elected representatives to treat SC elected representatives as equal during the course of their functioning under the PRS. This has resulted into a paradoxical situation, where, on the one hand, Panchayati Raj Act provides *de jure* powers to the office of the chairpersons at different levels and, on the other, *de facto*, they remain bereft of these powers. The local bureaucracy, which is expected to work under the control of the elected representatives of the Panchayats, is either generally away from the scene or succumbs to the pressure of the village politics and power game.

But all has not been lost, and as they say, every cloud has a silver lining. The PRS has been

instrumental, to some extent, in igniting the process of releasing the depressed, oppressed and suppressed energy of these groups who got the opportunity to come forward as elected representatives. It was found that wherever the Dalit elected representatives were oppressed and obstructed by the dominant castes, they came out openly to resist and to struggle against the oppressors. Importantly, it was also found that whenever the women Panchayat leaders were literate, they were found to be more assertive than the others. The other side of the phenomenon is that the elected representatives of these groups, especially the educated ones among them, had become quite visible, assertive and vocal whenever the circumstances allowed. It may be treated as the beginning of the end of the invisibility of these sections in the local governance scenario.

Thus, the affirmative action for these groups in local governance has resulted in social identities and political awareness among them and created an urge to become part of the mainstream political, economic and social life. The political space given to marginalised sections has, to some extent, dealt a blow to the asymmetrical social structure at the local level and given greater space for their participation and involvement in decision-making at local level.

Road Ahead for further Deepening of Decentralisation

A five pronged strategy has been given below, which is, if implemented in letter and spirit would enable Panchayats more strong and their elected representatives would be more knowledgeable and assertive in performing their task at local level.

1. There is need for Constitutional amendment, which should aim at removing discrepancies in the allocation of functions, finances and functionaries and establishing organic links between and among the tiers of the panchayats, preparation of decentralised plans and making Extension Act effective.
2. Effective demand for *de facto* decentralization from panchayat leaders is also important. For this, social mobilisation is required. Social mobilization could be done only through a social movement from greater autonomy of the panchayats in discharging their responsibilities. The political parties should also accept effective decentralisation as one

- of the issues in their election manifestos and panchayat leaders use that for pressurising the political parties to implement the same.
3. Basic infrastructure like office building may be provided to the panchayats. The midterm appraisal of the 11th plan indicates that out of the 2, 32, 638 Gram Panchayats, 78, 868 (34%) have no buildings and 59, 245 (25%) require major renovation. Now, in such a situation, one can imagine the level of discussion could take place in the villages where society is divided on caste and class basis.
4. Panchayats are expected to prepare decentralised plan, which is basically integrated area plan. For effective decentralised plan, Gram Panchayat may be reorganized demographically and geographically to make them viable institutions for local development. Besides, Gram Panchayats must have a full-fledged secretariat where all local officials relating to various departments sit there and villagers instead of going to the house of panchayat president visit the panchayat secretariat.
5. Training and capacity building is a process of empowerment of people/communities/organizations to take up activities for their development. In fact, capacity building has two components namely competence and commitment. Competence denotes training which comprises three things knowledge, skill and attitudes. The commitment denotes not the *chalta hai* (can work) syndrome, but the concern and commitment on the part of the trainers and others who are involved in the process of the capacity building for developing human resources engaged in local development.

To conclude, above analysis shows that not much powers have been given to the Panchayats even after two decades of its implementation of the Central Act in the country. Marginalised groups have got the seats in the local governance but they are not as effective as should be due to caste prejudices and lack of capacity to governance. Remedy lies in organic organization of Panchayat leaders to assert and bargain for the empowerment of local self governments.

(The author is a Senior Indian Economic Service Officer & Director in the Ministry of Rural Development).

EMPOWERING PANCHAYATS FOR BETTER SERVICE DELIVERY

Chaudhary Birender Singh

The 73rd Amendment to the Constitution, made effective from April 1993, has institutionalized the Panchayats as the units of local self-governments and the date marks a major milestone in the history of decentralization of political power to the people. Panchayats are critical for preparation of context specific plans to address poverty, local infrastructure and socio-economic needs. Strengthening of the Panchayats through manpower, office, space, ICT etc. is therefore, critical.

The efforts of the Ministry has been to strengthen the capacity of the Panchayats in delivering the services which they are intended to provide to the people and to support states to devolve powers to the panchayats and to promote transparency and accountability. The Panchayat Raj Ministry undertook these functions during 2014-15 through its flagship programme of Rajiv Gandhi Panchayat Sashaktikaran Abhiyan (RGPSA). During the year, the Ministry could sanction more than 75,000 personnel at the Gram Panchayat level, 2037 new Panchayat Bhawans and 19,741 computers for Gram Panchayats. Training for nearly 17 lakh Panchayat Elected Representatives was also approved. Strengthening of Panchayats through RGPSA also supported good governance and improved service delivery at the grassroot level for the poor strata of the society. As representation of Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and women is mandated in Panchayats, the strengthening of Panchayats implies strengthening of pro-poor

institutions, which has a long term impact on pro-poor programmes and activities.

During the year, Ministry was also implementing the Backward Regions Grant Fund Programme (BRGF), which provided funds to 272 backward districts in the country for addressing regional developmental imbalances and filling up the resource gaps of other schemes on the basis of local need based plans prepared by the local bodies and for capacity building of Panchayats and Municipalities. An amount of Rs. 2,779.41 crores for 185 districts as Development Grant component and Rs. 57.59 crores for 11 states as Capacity Building Grant component was released during 2014-15. Most of the proposals were processed in e-office resulting in quick disposal. From 2015-16, BRGF, along with the state component of RGPSA has been transferred to states.

Ministry's e-Panchayat project aims to automate the functioning of Panchayats and addresses all aspects of Panchayats' functioning including planning, monitoring, implementation, budgeting, accounting, social audit and delivery of citizen services like issue of certificates, licenses etc. Initiatives taken during the year under e-Panchayat project included incorporation of GIS concepts in the IT training to Elected Representatives and Panchayat Functionaries to introduce the local bodies to the usage of space technology, a pilot exercise of mapping Panchayat assets in 10 Gram Panchayats and a mobile application for this purpose, preparation of a

template for development of e-governance perspective plan for PRIs which was shared with the state/UTs etc. The Ministry is promoting electronic delivery of services through Panchayats and has facilitated experience sharing of best practices of Chhattisgarh, Maharashtra, etc. with other states and Union Territories. The Ministry is also working



towards promulgating IT literacy up to the grassroots level.



The Ministry has been preparing simple reading material for panchayat representatives and functionaries under the 'Active Panchayat' series, and during the year, five books were prepared and made available to states. These related to sanitation drinking water governance child development and animal husbandry in Gram Panchayats. States are translating these books and adapting them in their context. Under the 'Active Gram Sabha' series a reader on sanitation for Gram Sabhas was also made available to states. These books will help states in making panchayats more capable of assisting the poor.

Audio-video and animation training films were prepared for educating the panchayat representatives and functionaries about their duties and responsibilities. Database of contact details (mobile numbers and e-mail addresses) of elected representatives and functionaries was collected and compiled and given to the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting. This database is being used for conveying short messages.

The Fourteenth Finance Commission (FFC) has recommended devolution of grants to the tune of Rs. 2,00,292.20 crores to Gram Panchayats for the award period 2015-20. This amount is more than three times the grant of the 13th FC. The grants are intended to be used to improve the status of basic services including water supply, sanitation including seepage management, sewerage and solid waste management, storm water drainage, maintenance of community assets, maintenance of roads, footpaths and street-lighting, and burial and cremation grounds. The effective utilisation of this grant is a big challenge and the Ministry during the last few months has been rigorously interacting

with the state Governments on ways of equipping the Panchayats for carrying out this massive task. The Ministry had a day-long meeting with the state Secretaries of Panchayati Raj on 8th May 2015 to familiarise them with the recommendations of the FFC and the actions to be initiated by the states for the speedy and effective use of the FFC funds. The Ministry organised a workshop on Own Source Revenue (OSR) at Hyderabad from 11-13, June 2015. 24 states prepared action plans and 10 best practices were identified which would be documented and disseminated. The Ministry also organised a five day major Writeshop from 8-13 June 2015 with all states, which culminated in preparation of state specific draft guidelines for preparation of GP level plans by the state teams. The Ministry is also in the process of constituting national level resource persons who will be given charge of states who will assist the Panchayats in the preparation of GP development plans.



Ministry's efforts in the coming months would include assisting the state governments/gram panchayats in the preparation of GP development plans for effectively utilising the FFC funds, capacity building of panchayat functionaries to enable them to perform their functions efficiently, providing e-governance at the GP level which will make the Panchayats symbols of modernity and efficiency and induce mass ICT culture, ways to effectively implement PESA (Panchayat Extension to Scheduled Areas Act, 1996), and changes in the Constitutional framework to give more representation to women in PRIs.

(The author is Union Minister of Rural Development, Panchayati Raj, Drinking Water & Sanitation)

(PIB Special Feature on Independence Day)

EVOLVING FACETS OF DEMOCRACY: PANCHAYATI RAJ IN KERALA

Oommen John

A unique feature of Kerala's decentralisation is the financial devolution whereby more than a third of the State's plan resources are devolved to the local governments, with the rural local governments getting 85 per cent share in accordance with the rural population. The key features of fiscal decentralisation in the state are

Kerala, unlike other states had only panchayats and not panchayati raj for a long time. It was only with the enactment of the 73rd Amendment Act and passing of the Kerala Panchayat Raj Act, 1994 that Kerala introduced the three-tier system of PRIs. It was one of the last states to pass the state act as stipulated by the 73rd Constitutional Amendment i.e. on 23 April 1994. But since then, Kerala emerged as one of the few states that have really devolved functions, finances and functionaries to the PRIs making them strong and powerful Institutions of Local Self Government as envisaged in the Act. With the sweeping changes, Kerala has now become a model for other states to emulate in the area of decentralized governance. The state will be witnessing the fifth elections during November, 2015 to the local bodies after the enactment of the Act. This article details the features of decentralization process in Kerala and analyses why the process has become a model in decentralized governance.

Organic Farming in School

The important land marks in Kerala's decentralized process include transfer of powers and functions to Local Self Governments (LSGIs), adoption of separate budget documents for LSGIs, decision to devolve 35 to 40% of the Annual Plan funds to LSGI, launching of People's Campaign in August 1996, institution building at different tiers and levels, restructuring of the relevant state level Acts and Rules. The subjects mentioned in the Eleventh Schedule have been clearly unbundled into activities and sub-activities for each level and the Kerala Panchayati Raj Act and the various schedules clearly spells out detailed subject-wise activities entrusted to each layer of panchayats. The activities listed in the schedule were supplemented by various GOs and orders issued by the government to support the decentralization process. The approach to

Decentralisation which was followed in Kerala is best summed up by the Sen Committee.

"Local self-government is essentially the empowerment of the people by giving them not only the voice, but the power of choice as well; in order to shape the development which they feel is appropriate to their situation. It implies maximum decentralisation of powers to enable the elected bodies to function as autonomous units with adequate power, authority and resources to discharge the basic responsibility of bringing about "economic development and social justice". It is not enough to formally transfer powers and responsibilities to the LSGIs. They have to be vested with the authority to exercise them fully which requires concordant changes not only in the appropriate rules, manuals, government orders and circulars governing development administration, but also in the conventions, practices and even the value premises of the government agencies. Decentralisation does not mean just deconcentration where subordinate is allowed to act on behalf of the superior without a real transfer of authority, or delegation, where powers are formally conferred on a subordinate without any real transfer of authority. It implies devolution; where real power and authority are transferred to enable autonomous functioning within defined areas".

History of Decentralisation

The question of decentralization of governance has been seriously discussed since the inception of the state in 1956. For example, the first Administrative Reforms Committee in an Indian state was appointed by the first Kerala government in 1957 and its report is still considered to be a very rich document in India. The Committee envisaged constitution of village panchayat as viable and basic grassroots-level unit of administration and local development.

The Committee emphasised the need to integrate the revenue and development functions. Thereafter, several attempts were made to strengthen the local governments, through various enactments and administrative measures. But all attempts failed because of the political instability in the state. Until 1995, Kerala had only Panchayats and not Panchayat Raj. The only notable exemption was the District Councils of 1991 which were constituted on the basis of Kerala District Administration Act.



Structure of Panchayati Raj

The Kerala Panchayat Raj Act, 1994 provides for the constitution of Grama Panchayat, Block Panchayat and District Panchayat at the village level, sub-district level and district level. It also provides for constitution of GramaSabhas in each ward of the Grama Panchayat.

Grama Sabhas

The Grama Sabha has been given a pivotal role in the decentralisation process. This has been used as a vehicle for bringing about greater participation of people in the developmental activities of the panchayat. The GramaSabhas are constituted for each constituency or ward of the Grama Panchayat. The Kerala Panchayat Raj Act, 1994 dwells at length with the powers and responsibilities of the Grama Sabha. It has been given 18 kinds of powers, functions and rights. Apart from this, it has also been given eight responsibilities of various kinds. It is the body for the selection of beneficiaries for all schemes implemented by the local bodies.

Grama Panchayats

The Grama Panchayat has been made the pivot of Panchayati Raj system in the state and accordingly it has been given the maximum powers. Care has

been taken to give the Grama Panchayats the responsibilities of asset creation, operation and its maintenance and a vital role in the planning process which begins with the convening of the GramaSabhas. The powers of the Grama Panchayat are defined in Section 166 of the Kerala Panchayat Raj Act. The government has transferred 13 departments and posts to the GPs. 27 functions have been given to it under the mandatory category. Apart from this, 14 general functions and 19 sector-wise responsibilities have also been given to it. It is the only tier having taxation powers.

The number of Grama Panchayats has been reduced from 978 in 2010 to 941 in 2015. This is because of some Grama Panchayats being converted into Municipalities. The number of Municipalities has increased from 60 to 86. The Malappuram district has the largest number of Grama Panchayats (94) followed by Palakkad (88) and Thrissur (86).

Block Panchayats

There are 152 Block Panchayats in the state. These are constituted at the block level. The number of directly elected members of Block Panchayat should not be less than 15 and should not exceed 20. The Block Panchayats have not been given much responsibility and their involvement is more in giving technical expertise to the plans formulated by the Grama Panchayats.

District Panchayats

There are 14 District Panchayats in the state and they have been given three general functions and 16 sector wise responsibilities. The number of directly elected members of the district Panchayat should not be less than 15 and should not exceed 30. The departments transferred are ten to District Panchayats.

Transfer of Three Fs

Functions

The Government has given functional autonomy to the three levels of Panchayat Raj. But unlike other states, the Panchayat Raj on Kerala is not seen as a hierarchy. Through organic linkage exist between the three tiers in the form of ex-officio membership, each tier is independent of other and performs exclusive functions of its own. The functional areas of each tier have been defined as precisely as

possible in the Kerala Panchayat Raj Act, 1994. The Act classifies functions as mandatory, general and sector wise functions. The functions assigned to the Grama Panchayats, Block Panchayats and District Panchayats are listed in the Third, Fourth and Fifth Schedules respectively. Thus Kerala is the only state where Responsibility Mapping (Activity Mapping) has been enshrined in the Panchayat Raj Act itself.

Functionaries

The Government of Kerala issued a comprehensive order in September, 1995 transferring various institutions and staff to the three tiers. This was done in Kerala on the principle of work and worker going together. As a compromise the cadres and service conditions were not disturbed and government continues to pay the salary of the transferred officials.



The Order also gave supremacy to the elected body and the President was declared as the executive authority. In order to achieve administrative and psychological integration with the Panchayati Raj system, the senior officials of transferred departments are made the ex-officio Secretaries for that subject. The local governments have full managerial but limited disciplinary control over the staff. They can assign any work to the staff transferred to them related to their area. They can review their performance and give them the required directions. They are also empowered to impose minor penalties on staff transferred. They have also been given power to suspend the non-gazetted officers. The Act also prescribes a code of conduct for the relations between the elected representatives and officials.

Finances

A unique feature of Kerala's decentralisation is

the financial devolution whereby more than a third of the State's plan resources are devolved to the local governments, with the rural local governments getting 85 per cent share in accordance with the rural population. The key features of fiscal decentralisation in the state are

- The entitlements of individual local governments are decided as per the formulae. There is zero discretion in the allotment of grants.
- All grants are provided in a separate document of the Budget called Appendix IV.
- The entire amount of grant is investible. This

Table : Formula Adopted by Kerala for Distribution of Funds to Local Governments

Indicators	Weightage			
	Grama Panchayat	Block Panchayat	District Panchayat	Municipality/ Corporation
Population excluding SC/ST	60	60	50	70
Tribal Population	5	5	5	5
Geographical area excluding area under forest	5	10	15	5
Area under Paddy	5	-	-	-
Own Income of the Grama Panchayat	10	-	-	-
Composite Index of Agricultural Laborers, Persons engaged in Livestock, Fisheries etc and Marginal Workers	15	25	20	-
Composite Index of Backwardness : Houses without Latrines, houses without electricity etc	-	-	10	20
Total	100	100	100	100

Source Kerala Budget, Appendix IV: Details of provisions earmarked to Panchayat Raj/nagarapalika institutions.

can be called 'pure money' as it does not include staff salaries and other administrative costs.

- The grants are predictable and are fully devolved.
- The formulae have a strong equalisation element with backwardness getting a weightage of nearly one third (Formula given in the table below).
- There is a high degree of autonomy in use of transferred resources. Within the framework prescribed local governments can decide any scheme and prepare detailed projects according to their priority.

Annual Budget

Appendix IV of the state budget sets out the budget of each of the local body by name. The share of the panchayats for current year is automatically credited to its account in the Treasury in the beginning of every month. Development Fund and Maintenance Fund are transferred in ten equal instalments and General Purpose Fund in twelve equal instalments.

Plan Funds

One unique feature of Kerala's decentralization process is the devolution of the plan funds to the local bodies as untied grants. The Development Fund is categorized into three categories – General, SCP and TSP. The local bodies have freedom to spend this money based on the needs emanating from the people but with certain restrictions – minimum of 30 per cent for Productive sector, maximum of 30 per cent for infrastructure. There is no restriction for the service sector.

The total funds under the General Sector are divided between Rural and Urban LSGs in the ratio of 83:17, which reflects the non-SC/ST population (as per 2001 census) living in rural and urban areas. The provisions allocated to rural LSGs are further apportioned in the ratio of 70:15:15 among Grama, Block and District Panchayats. The inter-se distribution of General Sector funds is done as per the formula.

Elections to PRIs

The term of the local bodies is five years and elections are being held systematically right from 1995. Elections were conducted in 1995, 2000, 2005 and 2010. The fifth elections will be held during November, 2015. The elections to the local

bodies in Kerala are held on party basis and the din and sound of parliament and assembly elections are evident in the local body elections also. State Election Commission has been given the mandate of conducting local government elections right from delimitation of constituencies' up to election of representatives.

Women Empowerment through Panchayats

With all the high development indicators in Kerala, the space occupied by women in the realm of national and state politics and work participation has been negligible. The lack of legislative power resulted in lack of access to and control of resources and opportunity to use resources at their disposal. Decentralisation of governance and providing space through reservation for women is an important step towards empowerment of women. This will empower them to negotiate, bargain and influence the decisions of the institutions at the grass root level. Kerala went beyond the mandate of one third reservations and reserved 50 per cent of the seats and also the post of chairpersons of the various tiers for women. This principle is followed for the post of chairpersons of the standing committee. If the post of chairperson is for general candidate, then the post of vice-president is reserved for women. The total percentage of women representation was around 51.7 per cent during the last term.

Apart from giving women representation in governance, Kerala took several initiatives as part of People's Plan Campaign (PPC) towards gender mainstreaming through ensuring better participation of women in the various stages of decentralized planning, insisting on a minimum of 10 per cent of plan funds to Women Component Plan (WCP), a gender impact statement in project assessment and so on. Each local government is expected to prepare a Women's status report (Oommen Committee).

Achievements and drawbacks of Decentralised Governance

The decentralization process in the state will be completing two decades since the first bodies were constituted in 1995. Much water has flowed over the years and considerable amount of money have been devolved to these bodies. There is lot of achievements to its credit along with lot of challenges facing it.

Reservation for Chairpersons at three levels of panchayats for 2015

Panchayat	Total	Women	SC	SC Women	ST	ST women
Grama Panchayat	941	417	46	46	6	8
Block Panchayat	152	67	8	8	1	2
District Panchayat	14	7	1	-	-	-

Achievements

1. The People's Planning Campaign has succeeded in providing a concrete methodology for participatory planning for local level development. Planning has been made possible within the reach of ordinary people. They are involved in all stages of planning right from formulation, implementation and monitoring. The result of this process was that the people were given not only a chance but also a voice in economic development.
2. Selection of beneficiaries is crucial for the successful implementation of any programme. But the normal tradition was to utilize the process of beneficiary selection for patronage by political leaders. But in Kerala, in order to ensure people's participation and transparency in the identification and selection of beneficiaries, the Grama Sabha has been given this power for most of the schemes implemented by the three tiers of Panchayati Raj. Transparent procedures are laid down to ensure that the beneficiaries are selected on the basis of eligibility criteria, which includes criteria for exclusion as well as criteria for inclusion.
3. The formula based devolution of funds has resulted in all local bodies getting their due of funds without any political patronage or other influences. This has also resulted in equitable flow of funds to all regions.
4. The panchayats are getting a considerable amount of money which they can plan and implement within the parameters laid down. The local bodies could create infrastructure as per the needs of the panchayat.
5. Separate funds have been set apart from preparing projects exclusively for women under the Women Component Plan and physically challenged and children.
6. Some local bodies have performed exemplary well in governance and thereby becoming

models for others to emulate. This includes panchayats of both fronts in the state. Kaviyur and Evaviperoor Grama Panchayats in Pathanamthitta district have won national and state honours for their exemplary performance in local self-governance. Kaviyur panchayat, received the Panchayat Sashaktikaran Puraskar of the Union Government for 2013-14 for its performance in local governance. This was in addition to the Swaraj Trophy of the state government in 2013 and the best Panchayat award of the district panchayat during 2011, 2012 and 2014. Eraviperoor Grama Panchayat, received the National Award for Public Administration during 2015. It implemented a number of innovative projects in the area of waste management. It is also the first ISO-9001 certified primary health centre in the state. The Green Army, a skilled labour bank, was formed by Wadakkanchery block panchayat as a solution to the acute labour shortage in the farm sector. Kollam District Panchayat was given the Rajiv Gandhi Panchayat Sashaktikaran Abhiyan award for 2014-15 for the effective implementation of innovative development schemes with commitment to society. The award carries a cash prize of Rs.50 lakh.

Sanitation Park

To conclude, whatever the limitations, the Panchayati Raj system in Kerala have come to stay and whatever be the dispensation of the state government, it will be difficult for the government to undo the system. The model that has emerged in Kerala can be replicated by other states taking into consideration their needs and priorities. Decentralisation is not a one off action and it needs the continued support and guidance of the state government. As long as there is synergy between the state government and the PR bodies, the bodies will be vibrant and will be able to bring about a real change in the local governance.

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PANCHAYAT RAJ (EXTENSION TO SCHEDULED AREAS) ACT, 1996: THE TRAVAILS OF A GOVERNANCE LAW

C.R Bijoy

PESA bars the Panchayats at the higher level from assuming the powers and authority of any Panchayat at the lower level or of the Gram Sabha. The offices of the Chairpersons in the Panchayats at all levels are to be reserved for Scheduled Tribes (STs). Reservations of seats at every Panchayat for the STs are not to be less than one-half of the total number of seats.

It has been two decades since the Panchayat Raj (Extension to Scheduled Areas) Act (PESA) was enacted in 1996 to extend Part IX of the Constitution to the Fifth Schedule Areas of Andhra Pradesh (undivided), Gujarat, Himachal Pradesh, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Maharashtra, Odisha and Rajasthan. A unique and remarkable flagship legislation, this brings together the simple system of tribal communities governed by their respective customs and traditions, and the formal system of the state. PESA recognizes the hamlet or group of hamlets level assembly of people (*Gram Sabha*) as against the elected members (Gram Panchayat) to be preeminent. The *Gram Sabhas* are deemed to be competent to act on a range of powers namely -

- Safeguard and preserve their traditions and customs, cultural identity, community resources and the customary mode of dispute resolution
- Prevention of alienation of land and restoration of any unlawfully alienated land of Scheduled Tribes
- Control over institutions and functionaries in all social sectors
- The ownership of minor forest produce
- Management of village markets
- Control over money lending to the Scheduled Tribes
- Enforcement of prohibition, or regulation or restriction of the sale and consumption of any intoxicant
- Control local plans, and resources for such plans, including tribal sub-plans
- Approval of social and economic developmental programmes

- Selection of beneficiaries under poverty alleviation and other programmes
- Issue utilisation certificates for government works undertaken in their village
- Recommendation in granting prospecting license or mining leases for minor minerals, and concessions for the exploitation of minor minerals by auction

Consultation on matters of land acquisition

PESA bars the Panchayats at the higher level from assuming the powers and authority of any Panchayat at the lower level or of the *Gram Sabha*. The office of the Chairpersons in the Panchayats at all levels are to be reserved for Scheduled Tribes (STs). Reservations of seats at every Panchayat for the STs are not to be less than one-half of the total number of seats. The states are to follow the Sixth Schedule pattern of Autonomous District Councils (ADCs) with legislative and executive powers on certain specific subjects, as available in parts of the north-eastern states, for the Panchayats at district levels in the Scheduled Area.

PESA marks a new genre in India's legislative history that decolonizes and radically democratizes governance through participatory democracy. Not surprisingly, considering the experience of Panchayat Raj Institutions (PRIs) in the non-Scheduled Area, the Ministry of Panchayat Raj (MoPR) formulated fundamental changes to Article 243 in 2010 through amendments in tune with PESA incorporating the Sixth Schedule structure, with Schedule 13 - a new Schedule to the Constitution - listing the subjects covered under PESA solely under the purview of *Gram Sabha* and *Ward Sabha* as distinct from the Union, State and Concurrent lists. MoPR proposed another set of Amendments for the Sixth Schedule.

These proposals were circulated to the concerned States.

Scheduled Area

About 15% of the country's land area is tribal dominated. These self-governing communities were nominally part of various kingdoms prior to British rule. They resisted incursions into their domain. British intrusions were met with persistent revolts. This, and the limited economic interests, led the British to treat these areas as excluded and partially excluded areas under the Scheduled Districts Act, 1874 with some offers of protection. Governors of the respective provinces could exclude the operation of ordinary laws. This got incorporated into the Government of India Act, 1919. The 1930 Simon Commission Report noted this area to be 3,10,798.573 sq kms with a population of about 11 million. This arrangement was carried over into the Indian Constitution under Article 244 – the Fifth Schedule and Sixth Schedule. The Fifth Schedule Areas covered the partially excluded areas in States other than Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura and Mizoram, while the excluded areas in Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura and Mizoram were mostly brought under the Sixth Schedule.

The Fifth Schedule is to preserve tribal autonomy, their cultures and economic empowerment to ensure social, economic and political justice for preservation of peace and good governance in the Scheduled Area. The President notifies Scheduled Area and can increase or alter such areas or rescind such an order. The governors of these states have to report to the President on the administration of Scheduled Areas, can issue directions to the state on the administration of the Scheduled Areas, make regulations for peace and good government of Scheduled Areas, prohibit or restrict the transfer of land by or among STs, and regulate the allotment of land to STs in such areas and the business of money lending to the members of STs. The governors can repeal or amend any Act of Parliament or of the State Legislature with regard to their application to the Scheduled Areas. These States are to constitute Tribes Advisory Councils (TAC) to advise the governors. The 'tribal areas' under the Sixth schedule are to be governed by Autonomous District Councils with wide ranging legislative, judicial and executive powers covering primary schools, markets, dispensaries, ferries, cattle ponds, roads, fisheries, road transport and water-ways etc.

Local Self-Governance

Traditionally the villages functioned as *self-governing village republics* with separation of power between the local chieftains to *maharajas* and the villages. The British introduced a hierarchical power structure. The Government of India Act, 1919 introduced local self-governing institutions and some provinces and princely states enacted such laws.

Most states passed Panchayat Raj laws in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Soon the PRIs declined or collapsed, either neglected or derailed in most states. To remedy this deterioration, the 73rd (Panchayat Raj) and 74th (Nagarpalika) constitutional amendment Acts were passed in 1992 and notified in 1993. Two new parts were added to the Constitution:

Part IX titled 'The Panchayats' and Part IXA titled 'The Municipalities'. 29 subjects were transferred to the Panchayats and 18 to the Municipalities. Within a year the states were to make suitable modifications to their laws to be in conformity with these amendments. These amendments had clear injunctions to exclude the Fifth and Sixth Schedule areas, for which the Parliament was to make separate enactments.

The Dilip Singh Bhuria Committee appointed by the Ministry of Rural Development recommended the exceptions and modifications in Part IX of the Constitution to be applied to the Panchayats and Municipalities in Scheduled Areas. Following widespread Adivasi mobilizations, the Government enacted PESA in 1996 based on the recommendations of the Bhuria Committee.

The States having Schedule Areas were to enact suitable amendments to the state Panchayat Raj laws incorporating PESA provisions within one year of PESA coming into force. All PESA inconsistent provisions in any law in force in the Scheduled Areas became null and void after a year. All states, except Jharkhand, incorporated PESA provisions within a year. Jharkhand, which did not have Panchayat Raj legislation, enacted its Panchayat Raj Act incorporating PESA in 2001.

Scheduled Area: Issues and Impact

Tribal habitations in Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, West Bengal, Uttar Pradesh and Jammu & Kashmir have not been brought under the Fifth

or Sixth Schedule despite persistent demands from local communities and recommendations from official bodies. Early this year, the Kerala government initiated the process of scheduling tribal habitations responding to tribal peoples agitations.

There are tribal habitations in the states having Scheduled Area that are left out. Various Government-appointed Committees had recommended including the remaining Tribal Sub-Plan, Modified Area Development Approach areas and similar pockets to the Scheduled Areas. This is not yet complied with fully by some states.

The *Provisions of the Municipalities (Extension to the Scheduled Areas) Bill, 2001* for the urban enclaves in Scheduled Areas is yet to be enacted by the Parliament.

PESA 1996

While incorporating the PESA provisions into the State Panchayat Raj Laws, states ignored Sec.4 (o) of PESA which requires the State Legislature 'to follow the pattern of the Sixth Schedule to the Constitution while designing the administrative arrangements in the Panchayats at district levels in the Scheduled Areas'. States did not incorporate all the PESA provisions into the state Panchayat Raj Laws fully; but instead they varied in the extent of compliance. The Ministry of Panchayati Raj continues to make effort for the incorporation of PESA provisions into state Panchayati Raj Laws.

While states have enacted compliance legislations vis-à-vis PESA, their provisions have been diluted. Some states are yet to amend all the subject laws and rules, such as those relating to money lending, forest, mining, excise, prevention of land alienation and restoration of illegally alienated land of STs etc. to harmonise with the state PESA provisions. Though the provisions in such laws are legally invalid after 12 December 1997, they continue to be followed by departments and their functionaries.

The laws that require harmonisation are the Land Acquisition Act, 1894, Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Act, 1957, the Indian Forest Act, 1927, the Forest Conservation Act, 1980, and the Indian Registration Act. National policies such as the National Water Policy, 2002, National Minerals Policy, 2003, National Forest Policy, 1988, Wildlife Conservation Strategy, 2002 and draft National Environment Policy, 2004 would also require harmonisation with PESA.

However, PESA frame of the supremacy of *Gram Sabha* and participatory democracy has been adopted in the Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006. The PESA provision to safeguard, preserve and manage community resources of which forest resources are a part, and ownership of minor forest produce are elaborated. As on May 2015, 16,54,431 titles have been issued over an area of 34,62,152 ha of forest land across the country.

The Gram Sabha or the Panchayats at the appropriate level are to be consulted before making the acquisition of land for developmental projects. This provision has been partially addressed by the introduction of 'prior consent' under Sec.41(3) of The Right to Fair Compensation and Transparency in Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation and Resettlement, Act 2013 which repealed the Land Acquisition Act 1894.

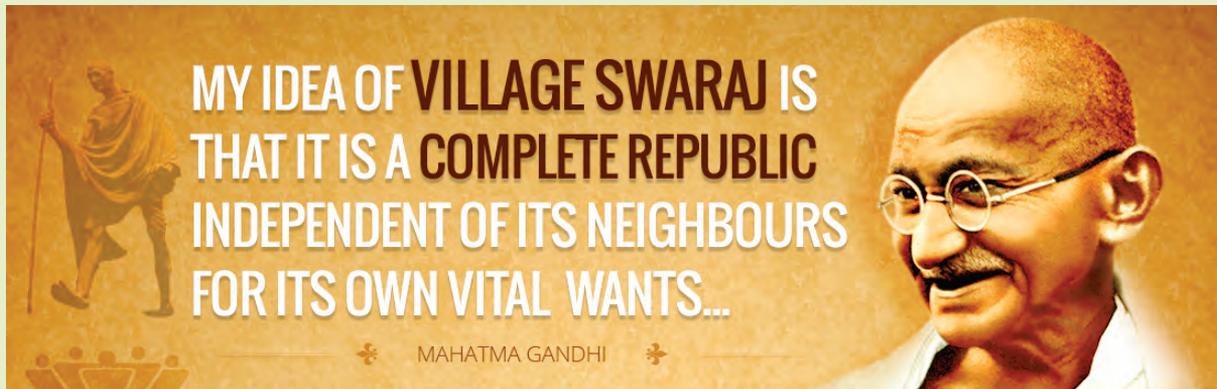
Most states have not operationalised PESA so far as rules have not been framed and notified except for Andhra Pradesh (undivided), Himachal Pradesh, Maharashtra and Rajasthan despite MoPR framing and circulating draft PESA model rules. PESA does not provide for the Union Government to formulate rules in case the state governments fail to do so.

The state Panchayats Act and their Rules lack harmony with the 73rd Amendment. There is inadequate devolution of powers - functions, funds and functionaries in the 29 subjects.

The *Gram Sabha* in the PRI structure is relegated to the lowest rung in terms of power and function in total contrast with PESA where *Gram Sabha* is supreme. Not being an empowered body, naturally the *Gram Sabha* meetings are irregular, and thinly attended. Significantly the traditional tribal *Gram Sabhas* in reality continue to provide the governance functions in Scheduled Areas as part of their to the extent possible amidst all odds and adversities. And actually these are all subjects that fall under the purview of PESA.

Despite PESA being in force for about 20 years, much needs to be done to ensure that the benefits of this remarkable legislation reaches the grassroots level of democracy.

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SALIENT FEATURES OF PANCHAYATI RAJ SYSTEM

The 73rd Constitutional amendment was enacted to reform the Panchayati Raj system, in order to further strengthen democratic process in India. The amendment was meant to provide constitutional sanction to establish democracy at the grassroots level as it is at the state or national level.

Its main features are as follows:-

- ❖ The **Gram Sabha** or Village Assembly as a deliberative body to decentralize governance has been envisaged as the basic foundation of the Panchayati Raj system. The amendment empowered the **Gram Sabha** to conduct social audits besides its other functions.
- ❖ A uniform three-tier structure of Panchayats at village (Gram Panchayat, intermediate or block (Panchayat Samiti) and district (Zilla Parishad) levels.
- ❖ All seats in a Panchayat at each level are to be filled by elections.
- ❖ Not less than one third of the seats for membership and office of chairpersons of each tier should be reserved for women.
- ❖ Reservations for Schedule Caste and Schedule Tribes have to be provided at every level as per their population in the Panchayats.
- ❖ To promote bottom up planning, the district planning committee in each district has been provided constitutional status.

The state legislatures have been given powers to decide on the composition of **Gram Sabha** and Gram Panchayats. Therefore, powers, functions and composition of Gram Panchayats are determined by state governments in line with local needs.

Gram Sabha is the basic foundation of Panchayati Raj system. A village with not less than 1500 population forms **Gram Sabha** and every adult becomes a member of it. If the population is less than that such villages are grouped together to form a **Gram Sabha**. The functions of **Gram Sabha** changes from time to time as prescribed by respective states.

The basic difference between **Gram Sabha** and Gram Panchayat is that, while **Gram Sabha** constitutes each adult member of a village, Gram Panchayat is the executive members elected by the **Gram Sabha** to work for the village development.

NEED FOR MORE TEETH TO PANCHAYATI RAJ SYSTEM

NC Saxena

Creation of Panchayats in India through a Constitutional Amendment in 1993 had initially raised hopes about their role in improving service delivery to the people, as decentralisation was expected to achieve higher economic efficiency, better accountability, larger resource mobilisation, lower cost of service provision, and higher satisfaction of local preferences. But studies show that although some village level panchayat leaders have done commendable work, elected local bodies on the whole have not benefited the people to the extent of funds provided by the government. Their record in empowering the excluded ones is even more disappointing.

Panchayats are more concerned with consolidating economic and social power with few leaders, often from elite groups. Rather than using the democratic process to change inequitable rural societies, gram panchayats function more or less as “political” bodies, i.e., organisations dealing with power, and development funds are used to consolidate that power.

Scenario is worse at the block and district level. This is despite the fact that these two tiers have sufficient funds and staff at their command, when compared with the village tier. The elected members of the panchayati raj institutions (PRIs) at these levels behave more or less as contractors, with no

institution of the *gram sabhas* at that level to put moral pressure on them.

We discuss below how their efficiency and delivery can be improved.

Involve them in social sector - Panchayats at all levels are mostly busy implementing construction oriented schemes, which promote contractor - wage labour relationship. This does not require participation of the poor as equals, on the other hand it fosters dependency of the poor on *sarpanch* and block staff. In such a situation panchayat activities get reduced to collusion between *sarpanch* and block engineers. Panchayats should be made more active in the fields of education, health, self help groups (SHGs), watershed, nutrition, pastures and forestry programmes, which require people to come together as equals and work through consensus.

Devolve funds, functions & functionaries- So far the progress on fiscal and functional decentralisation has been disappointing. Except Kerala, no other state has taken any positive step to devolve funds, functions and functionaries to the PRIs to enable the panchayats to discharge this constitutionally mandated function properly. Further, it is imperative that the PRIs have resources to match the responsibilities placed on them. While state finance commissions have submitted their recommendations, very few state commissions



have implemented this or taken the necessary steps to ensure fiscal viability of the PRIs. The liberal devolution through the Central XIV Finance Commission should be used to build their capacity and make them pro-poor.

Control over village staff - Attendance and work of important field level functionaries whose work touches the lives of almost every person in the village, such as teachers, doctors, ANMs, anganwadi workers, agricultural assistants, veterinary doctors and electricity department linemen should be monitored by *gram sabhas*, regardless of the tier to which they answer. The creation of local cadres through administrative and legislative measures is essential so that panchayats can function effectively, execute schemes and are accountable to the people. This would also reduce staff costs.

Parallel bodies - All CBOs (community based organisations) and parallel bodies created to impart education, sanitation, etc should be required to report periodically to the *gram sabhas*, so that the community as a whole is kept informed of the activities of parallel bodies. In fact they should be constituted as sub-committees of the *gram sabhas*.

Reduce control by bureaucracy - Instances have been reported where the gram panchayat *sarpanch* has to spend more time visiting block offices. There are also instances of harassment by block level officials. Systems which require gram panchayat *pradhan/sarpanch* to approach block office for funds and/or technical approval need to be drastically changed. Village bodies should be able to spend funds on their own instead of taking technical approval from government officials. These interactions with the block staff distort the role of *sarpanch* as elected representatives of the *gram*

sabha and induct them into the bad old ways of official rule, besides encouraging corruption.

Empower Gram Sabhas - *Gram Sabha* meetings were regularly held at few places, and in most cases, participation of *gram sabha* meetings was low. Often such meetings were only on paper. Empowering *gram sabhas* and strengthening their control over panchayats could have been a powerful weapon towards transparency, and involvement of the poor and marginalized section of the society. For instance, *Gram Sabha* should be the final authority. However, most of the states have not spelt the powers of *gram sabhas* and have not laid down the functions of these bodies.

Follow community approach - No programme that aims at generating social capital can be successful in isolation in the long run unless a significant number of developmental programmes follow the community approach. Therefore, developmental programmes should aim at both – institution building as well as economic security for the poor - and develop multi-sectoral indicators for judging how well it has performed.

Panchayats in Schedule V areas - State Governments should make appropriate amendments in their state Laws / Acts which impinge on specific provisions contained in the Central Act for Schedule V areas in the central tribal region, called PESA. As of now very few states have devolved powers of ownership with *gram sabhas* over minor minerals, minor forest products and water bodies, as provided under PESA.

Encourage them to use fiscal powers – At the village level, an important power devolved to Gram Panchayat is the right to levy tax on property,



business, markets, fairs and for the service provided, like street lighting or public toilets, among other. Only a small number of village people are aware of this fiscal power, as it is not in use. Very few panchayats use their fiscal power to levy new taxes. The argument pushed by the panchayat heads is that it is difficult to levy tax on your own constituency, especially when you live in the community.



Reduce dependency on Government funding and change financing system - A review of money received and Own Source Funds shows the overwhelming dependency (often more than 95%) of Panchayats on government funding. How these funds are used is not properly audited. These funds are a soft option and discourage any effort to generate local revenue. When panchayats do not raise internal resources and instead receive funds from outside, people are less likely to request for social audit (i.e., accountability of PRI) if they are not asked to pay taxes.

It is therefore necessary to reconsider the current funding system. For instance, Tamil Nadu collects land tax through government machinery and then transfers 85% to the panchayats. It will be more cost effective if the entire burden of collection is shifted to the village panchayats, and they in turn transfer 15% of the collected taxes to government. Today the PRIs hesitate to levy and collect taxes, as they prefer the soft option of receiving grants from government of India. This must be discouraged and the local bodies be encouraged to raise local resources for development and then receive matching grants from the Centre/States. The more dependent a PRI is on the mass of its citizens for financial resources, the more likely it is to use scarce material resources to promote human development and reduce poverty.

External funds with no commitment to raise internal funds make PRIs irresponsible and corrupt.

Give untied grants – Another factor limiting initiative is the tied nature of funds disbursed to these institutions. They generally prescribe activities and target groups for the scheme as a whole. This has two implications. Firstly, the activities stated under certain schemes are not always appropriate for all parts of the country/state. This results in unsuitable activities being promoted or under utilisation of funds, and hence loss of funds. Secondly, tied funds are inflexible, giving little scope for tailoring to local needs and conditions.

Panchayats would need a higher share in state and central revenues. States need to increase the share of transfers to PRIs from state governments as untied grants, by (i) consolidating state schemes with broad rural development objectives into untied grants, as Kerala has done; (ii) making these grants a share of state revenues, (iii) explicitly defining through state legislation a formula to allocate grants to jurisdictions and PRI levels, and (iv) transfer collection of village taxes, such as land revenue, irrigation tax to PRIs.

The formula of transfer should no doubt give weightage to population and poverty, but also to performance and efficiency, so that there is incentive to them for increasing the sources of own revenues of PRIs through own and assigned taxes and increasing their capacity to collect. State grants should be given to them only when the PRIs are able to collect a minimum percentage of the taxes assigned to them. Flow of funds from the state/GOI should also be dependent on good work or mobilization done by them.

Therefore, the additional allocations recommended by the Union Finance Commission to states, and in particular the supplementary sources to local governments, should be contingent upon the states fully implementing the suggestions given above.

Link devolution with performance-A “Devolution Index” may be prepared for all states, and at least 1/3rd allocation of centrally-sponsored schemes in the panchayat functional domain or block grant (when introduced) may be allocated to the state governments on the basis of this index.

Social audit and ranking of panchayats - Large expenditures are now being incurred by PRIs. Their accounts are to be audited by Local Fund Audit, but there are several problems. First, there are huge arrears, and in some cases accounts have not been audited for more than ten years. Secondly, the quality of their reports is very poor, therefore the utility of such audits is doubtful, the impact it makes on improving systems is at best marginal, perhaps negative. Thirdly, there are complaints of corruption, and the general impression is that audit reports can be bought. Lastly, elected officials are not held accountable for any lapses noticed in their reports, only officials are, which breeds irresponsible behaviour on the part of non-officials.

The quality of work done by panchayats should be closely monitored by a team of journalists, civil society members, panchayat leaders from the neighbouring districts (who have already done excellent work), and stakeholders. Based on these reports, panchayats should be graded, and future funds should be linked with their grade. Strengthening financial management and audit procedures will also strengthen accountability of the local bodies, their standing committees and its representatives to the people as well as to the government.

Through a carefully designed methodology, it is quite possible to measure the performance of panchayats, and to what extent they are inclusive and participative. In Uttar Pradesh, a study evolved some criteria for ranking twenty panchayats. Not surprisingly, in most of the study panchayats (75 percent) ranked in 'Unsatisfactory' or 'Very Unsatisfactory' category. But two achieved 'Good' rank while three other panchayats achieved 'Very Good' rank. Notably, two of the best functioning panchayats in the sample were headed by women *Sarpanches*.

Increase the use of IT- IT as a tool can be effectively used in the area of implementation by the PRIs. Several transactions can be carried out using online applications. This has been sufficiently demonstrated in various pilot projects carried out across the country. For instance, land records can be put on the web, and then disseminated through the private kiosks.

Improve governance - Rural decentralisation and PRIs have made profound changes in rural India.

They may ultimately offer a better option for rural development and poverty alleviation. Disadvantaged jurisdictions could then be the main winners. It is an important opportunity.

The process of decentralizing administrative and financial functions to the panchayats after putting in place some of the critical accountability mechanisms should start at once so that decentralisation does not lead to favouritism, nepotism and corruption or abdication of responsibilities.

Effective panchayats would also require effective district and block level administration. Hence efforts towards better accountability and performance from local bureaucracy should go simultaneously along with building local PRI capabilities. Bureaucracy needs to be made accountable to the people through greater transparency, more frequent public consultations, vibrant grievance redressal systems, independent monitoring, frequent third party assessments, rights-based development framework, and honouring citizens charters that describe what quality services they can expect from government.

Thus there are big risks in premature promotion of PRIs. Past attempts of decentralisation failed in India. If not carefully designed, sequenced and implemented, decentralisation can increase the fiscal burden on the states and lead to a break down in service delivery, in particular to the poor. Effective panchayats would also require effective district and block level administration. Hence efforts towards better accountability and performance from local bureaucracy should go simultaneously along with building local PRI capabilities, otherwise the elected PRI leaders would not change their perception of the state being an 'open treasury'.

Thus civil service reforms that would strengthen district administration must go hand-in-hand with empowerment of panchayats. Professional and responsive public administration will be an asset for both, the social sector as well as for enabling panchayats to play an important role that is mandated for them.

(The author is former Secretary, Planning Commission. He has also served as Secretary, Ministry of Rural Development and Secretary, Minorities Commission. Currently he advises United Nations on developmental issues)



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EMPOWERMENT THROUGH E-PANCHAYAT

Lalan Kumar Mahto

In India, the Panchayati Raj now functions as a system of governance in which gram panchayats are the basic unit of local administration. The system has three levels - gram panchayat (village level), mandal parishad or block samiti or panchayat samiti (block level) and zilla parishad (district level). It was formalised in 1992 by the 73rd amendment to the Indian Constitution.

Ministry of Panchayati Raj is responsible for the work of advocacy for and monitoring of the implementation of Constitution 73rd Amendment Act the Provisions of the Panchayats (Extension to Scheduled Areas) Act 1996. The State governments/ Union Territory Administrations, at present, are at varying degrees of the implementation of 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendment Acts. The Ministry, inter-alia, would ensure that they hold timely elections, set up State Finance Commissions and implement their recommendations, constitute District Planning Committees and empower them suitably to ensure grass-root level planning to feed into State and Central level Planning effectively. One major task of the Ministry will be to ensure that the State Governments/UT administrations devolve funds, functions and functionaries on the Panchayati Raj Institutions in the spirit of the Constitutional provisions.

e-Panchayat

As per the World Bank, "E-Government refers to the use by government agencies of information technologies (such as Wide Area Networks, the

Internet, and mobile computing) that have the ability to transform relations with citizens, businesses, and other arms of government." Government of India, with an intention to transform the governance landscape by ensuring participation of citizens in policy making and providing ease of access to information to the citizens, introduced the National e-Governance Plan (NeGP) in 2006. The vision of the NeGP was to "Make all Government services accessible to the common man in his locality, through common service delivery outlets and ensure efficiency, transparency & reliability of such services at affordable costs to realise the basic needs of the common man." e- Panchayat is one of the Mission Mode Projects (MMP), currently being implemented with a vision to empower and transform rural India.

As a first step towards formulating the project, the Ministry of Panchayati Raj constituted an Expert Group in June, 2007 under the Chairmanship of Dr. B.K. Gairola, Director General, NIC, Government of India. The Expert Group was entrusted with the task of assessing the IT Programmes of the Ministry of Panchayati Raj and recommending cost effective solutions along with cost implications. Adopting a consultative approach, the Committee interacted with the States/UTs to assess the existing status of computerization up to the Gram Panchayat level, including the initiatives undertaken by the state Governments. In order to understand the ground realities, the Committee conducted field visits to some of the Gram Panchayats in the selected rural areas where some IT initiatives had been undertaken. Inputs from eminent experts in the public and private



sector were also taken into account as part of the consultative process. In essence, it found that while some computerization efforts had already been made at Panchayat level by States like Gujarat, West Bengal, Karnataka, Kerala, Andhra Pradesh and Goa, these attempts were limited as they were driven by short term goals and were unable to completely transform Panchayats due to the lack of a holistic perspective. It was felt that a more comprehensive approach was required to make a cognizable impact on the functioning of the Panchayats for the benefit of the citizens. These recommendations formed the basis for the conceptualization of e-Panchayat MMP.

The e-Panchayat project holds great promise for the rural masses as it aims to transform the Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) into symbols of modernity, transparency and efficiency. This is a one of its kind nationwide IT initiative introduced by Ministry of Panchayati Raj that endeavours to ensure people's participation in programme decision making, implementation and delivery. The project aims to automate the functioning of 2.45 lakh Panchayats in the country. The project addresses all aspects of Panchayats' functioning including Planning, Monitoring, Implementation, Budgeting, Accounting, Social Audit and delivery of citizen services like issue of certificates, licenses etc.

Project Conceptualization

e-Panchayat MMP is aimed at automating internal work flow processes of Panchayats across the country. This will cover approximately 30 lakh elected members and several lakh PRI functionaries. In 2009-10, in order to lay a strong foundation for e-Panchayat and to ensure that project evolved through an elaborate consultative process, Ministry of Panchayati Raj (MoPR) commissioned a comprehensive study covering all States and UTs to identify all the Information and Service Needs of the stakeholders viz. Central Ministries, State Departments, Panchayats and Citizens. Field studies were conducted in 135 Panchayats across 45 Districts covering all 34 States/UTs. 23 Central Schemes were studied and discussions were held with 11 Central Ministries, their State Departments, District and Block Administrations and several field level functionaries. Inputs were also taken from *Gram Sabha* meetings and through other focused group discussions with citizens.



After the needs assessment study, process re-engineering was suggested and a roadmap for e-enabling Panchayats across the country was developed. These reports on Information and Service Needs Assessment (ISNA), Business Process Re-engineering (BPR) and Detailed Project Reports (DPR) were developed for every State/UT in the country. These efforts culminated in the formulation of a National ISNA, National BPR and National DPR that set the roadmap for radically transforming decentralized local governance in the country.

Objectives of e-Panchayat Mission Mode Project

If the Panchayats are to perform efficiently and effectively all the mandated tasks, which are increasing day by day, extensive use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) is needed. Moreover, there is a strong need to build a "digital inclusive society" where large sections of rural population are able to benefit from new technologies; can access and share information and services freely and can participate in the development process more effectively.

The Panchayats being at the interface of rural citizens and governance structure are an effective vehicle to induce mass ICT culture at the grassroots level. It is with this broad vision that MoPR formulated a scheme for ICT enablement of all the Panchayats in the country on a Mission Mode approach. The e-Panchayat Mission Mode Project (MMP) is intended to address all the aspects of Panchayats' functioning from internal core functions such as Decentralized Planning, Budgeting, Accounting, Implementation and monitoring etc. to service delivery like issue of certificates, licenses etc.



Hence the key objectives of e-Panchayat Mission Mode Project are to use ICT for :

- Automation of internal workflow processes of Panchayats

- Improving delivery of services to citizens

- Capacity building of Panchayat Representatives and Officials

- Social Audit

- Transparency, Accountability, Efficiency and RTI compliance of Panchayats

- Improving Governance of local self-government

The Panchayats being the basic unit for planning and implementation of a large number of schemes and services, this MMP would also go a long way in improving public service delivery through PRIs with better outcomes.

Applications Developed Under e-Panchayat MMP

Under e-Panchayat a suite of 11 Core Common Applications has been envisaged that address nearly the entire spectrum of Panchayats' functioning viz. from internal core functions such as Planning, Monitoring, Implementation, Budgeting, Accounting, Social Audit etc. to citizen service delivery operations like issue of certificates, licenses etc. Together these eleven software Applications constitute the Panchayat Enterprise Suite (PES). Four of these Software Applications - namely PRIASoft, PlanPlus, National Panchayat Portal and Local Government Directory have been in use by the States/UTs for over three years now. Six more Applications namely Area Profiler, Service Plus, National Asset Directory, Action Soft, Social Audit & Meeting Management and Trainings Management were launched on the occasion of National Panchayati Raj Day on 24th April, 2012 and trainings are being imparted

on these Applications to enable easy adoption and hand holding of the States/UTs. A list of these 11 Applications is tabulated below :

Capacity Building Initiatives Under E-Panchayat MMP

Extensive trainings are required to build the capacity at grassroots level which is an enormous challenge due to inadequate availability of necessary infrastructure. Therefore, a cascading mode of training i.e. Training of the Trainers (ToT) has been adopted to create Master Trainers at State, District and Panchayat levels to ensure that trainings reach till grassroots level. The multiplier effect of ToT model offers an opportunity for informed local input in shaping the content and for facilitation of training appropriate to local culture and context.

The Ministry is providing training on Panchayat Enterprise Suite (PES) Applications and has advised the States/UTs to create a cadre of Master Trainers at State level so that they can be used to train officials at District and Panchayat level. The Ministry plans to create two Master Trainers per Application from each district in addition to 2-4 Master Trainers for each PES Application from State Panchayati Raj Department. Over 27,000 have been trained so far. To provide sustained and up-to-date training to end users, User Manuals, Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) and audio assisted CBTs (Computer Based Tutorial) have been made available for all PES Applications. CBTs and User Manuals have been prepared in English and are available for viewing/playing online while the users are working on the Software Applications and these can also be downloaded and played/used in off-line mode. These CBTs serve as authenticated training material, including for assisting Master Trainers during State & District level training programmes and can also be accessed by isolated users on demand. The CBTs can be used for providing continuous trainings to end users and thus are expected to expedite and improve the adoption of PES Applications. These CBTs are also enabled for translation in local languages for better absorption at local level.

On-line discussion groups (google-groups) are being used for each Application wherein users can send their queries and seek answers from MoPR, National Informatics Centre (NIC) or even from other states. These groups have been extremely effective in sharing ideas and providing immediate solutions to end users. They also serve as a knowledge database for reference as per need.

The Ministry has also made arrangements to provide basic computer training to Elected Representatives (ERs) and Panchayat Functionaries (PFs) to create awareness and basic understanding on the usage of computers. National Institute of Electronics and Information Technology (NIELIT), (previously DOEACC Society), has been engaged to impart these trainings at state level. The training is based on a simple syllabus including hands-on sessions for 36 hours over a six-day period. Over 19,000 ERs and PFs have been trained till date.

e-Panchayat Puraskar

The level of e-enablement in PRIs varies across States/UTs due to variations in the level of infrastructure, manpower and capacity in PRIs across the country which pose challenges in the implementation of the project. Experience over the past few years has shown various instances where the States/UTs have come up with innovative ways of overcoming these challenges.

The Ministry of Panchayati Raj incentivizes States/UTs to increasingly adopt the PES Applications to improve the day-to-day functioning of the PRIs. The Ministry, through the annual e-Panchayat Puraskars, recognizes the best performing States/UTs annually on the occasion of National Panchayat Day

Process of e-governance

The process of e-governance has already been started. The Government has decided to open one lakh common services centers across the country under National e-Government Plan (NeGP) in order to make all Government services accessible to the common man in his locality, and ensure efficiency, transparency and reliability of such services at

affordable costs to realise the basic needs of the common man. Now the Government of India has initiated the process to equip all Gram Panchayats with computers, or provide access to computers with broadband connectivity. All Panchayats at all levels need to be equipped with computing hardware and connectivity over the next few years. The approach would be to first use the kiosks being set up under the NeGP's Common Services Centres initiative. For the remaining Panchayats, it is proposed to engage independent service providers who would be selected on the basis of a bidding process. It has been also planned to equip all Panchayats with necessary software and skills to handle e-Governance for better delivery of services to citizens.

Action taken by Government

Governments at both the Central and state levels have the vision and strategies to bridge the digital divide and provide supporting infrastructure in rural areas to enhance the capacity of Panchayats. The Ministry of Power has introduced a scheme that aims at providing electricity in all villages and habitations within four years, thereby providing access to electricity to all rural households. It has been also proposed to achieve a rural tele-density of 25 per cent by means of 200 million rural connections by the end of the Eleventh Five Year Plan. The Eleventh Five Year Plan has also targeted providing broadband connectivity for all secondary and higher secondary schools, all public health care centers and Gram Panchayats. (Ministry of Finance, Government of India, Economic Survey 2008-09, p.247).

(The author is an advocate from Darbhanga, Bihar)

Centre to train 10,000 technicians in civil engineering for better execution of MGNREGA

The Centre will be training 10,000 young technicians in the basic concepts of civil engineering and involve them in planning, layout, measuring and supervising MGNREGA works in 2,500 most backward blocks across India. Termed as "barefoot" technicians any educated person identified from the local SC/ST MGNREGA worker households and specially trained in civil engineering concepts, using the customized training modules will be utilise. Recently, Union Minister for Rural Development Choudhary Birender Singh said that better training and skill development will not only contribute to creation of durable and good quality works but also more sustainable maintenance of assets. Similarly, to improve maintenance of the large PMGSY rural roads network (4,50,000 kilometers of PMGSY roads have been constructed across the country since the inception of PMGSY in December 2000), the training manuals for field engineers and contractors have already been used to train more than 6,000 engineers and contractors across the country during the last four months.

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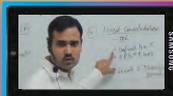
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EVOLUTION AND GROWTH OF PANCHAYATI RAJ IN UTTAR PRADESH

Sanjay Bhatnagar

Over the last two decades, there has been a steady growth in education and awareness among the rural folk, the credit of which largely goes to women empowerment, mainly through panchayati raj system where women are rubbing shoulders with the male counterparts in a big manner.

Village as the basic unit of governance was very germane to the idea of Gram Swaraj as envisaged by Mahatma Gandhi, basic to the vision of inclusive social and economic development. Yet it took our country almost four decades to usher in a Panchayati Raj with the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendment Acts. Their guiding principles included strengthening people's ownership and participation in local governance and decisions affecting their lives, following rights based approaches, and transparency in public administration.

Uttar Pradesh was one of the first few states to recognise Panchayati Raj Institutions as key institutions and brought in Panchayati Raj immediately after independence through the enactment of the UP Panchayat Raj Act, 1947. Following the recommendations of Balwant Rai Mehta Committee a three-tier system of panchayats was established through the enactment of the U.P. Kshetra Samitis and Zilla Parishads Act, 1961 (now, renamed as UP Kshetra Panchayats and Zilla Panchayats Adhiniyam, 1961). The Balwant Rai Mehta Committee found that the Community Development Programmes, when came at the Gram Panchayat level, were considered as programmes of the government and not programmes of the village people. The village self-sufficiency could not be attained without the active partnership of the village people.

The Mehta Committee, therefore, suggested that the villagers should be given power to decide about their own felt needs and implement the programmes accordingly.

It was further amended in 1980 to include provision of 30 per cent reservation for women and that at least one woman member in the Panchayat be a scheduled caste (SC). Following the Constitution (73rd Amendment) Act, 1992 in order to bring about conformity with the provisions of the Constitution,

the Government of U.P. amended the two Acts named above, through the Uttar Pradesh Panchayat Law (Amendment) Act, 1994.

The Law was passed with the objectives of holding elections of Panchayats, formulating the schemes of economic and social development, as associating SCs /STs, women and backward classes with the main stream of the development and ensuring reservations for them and strengthening the Panchayats economically.

The democratization of Panchayats through electoral process was another milestone in the long-drawn journey of Panchayati Raj, the example of Uttar Pradesh is worth mentioning owing to sheer magnitude of the process. The Panchayat elections in Uttar Pradesh, the largest state of the country in terms of population, in fact, reaffirm the political adage of dubbing Panchayat elections as mother of all elections.

The state election commission, entrusted with an onerous task of conducting the Panchayat polls in the state of over 20 crore people with all types of caste, creed and religious diversity, economic disparity and political awareness, has drawn up about three month long and tedious two-part multi-phase election plan for three layers of Panchayats - village, kshetra (block level) and district. In all, about 11.36 crore electorate would be voting for over 40 lakh candidates vying for nearly 8.85 lakh constitutional posts. In the first round, to be held in multiple phases, elections for 3,128 zilla and 77,295 kshetra Panchayat members would be held. In the second round, the electorates are to elect over 59,164 *gram pradhans* and 7,45,603 *gram panchayat* members.

Though elections of Panchayats are not being contested on party basis but the political alienations are more than clear, hence the fear of various types of

clashes which have become regular incidents during polls. As the state election commissioner S K Agarwal puts it "I am not bothered about the magnitude of the elections but by the timing of the polls."

He takes up the Panchayat polls as a challenge because the process is timed with various Hindu festivals including Dussehra and Deepawali and the muslims mourning period of Moharram.

If we look at the broader picture, the panchayat elections are just a small part of a giant machinery of the democratic decentralization process which was envisioned by Mahatma Gandhi. In UP, as many as 16 functions have been transferred to Panchayats out of the departments mentioned in the eleventh schedule of the Constitution. As per the recommendations of the Central 13th Finance Commission and the state finance commission, there is a provision for making funds available to the Panchayats for the maintenance of civic amenities and properties and implementing the schemes for social and economic development. Besides, under the rural development, the schemes like Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MNREGA) and other poverty alleviation schemes are conducted, funds are directly released to the Panchayats.

The nomenclature for the three levels of Panchayats

Level of Panchayat	Name used
District Panchayat	Zilla Panchayat
Intermediate Panchayat	Kshettra Panchayat
Village Panchayat	Gaon Panchayat

Under the first phase of decentralization, several activities have been transferred to Panchayats viz. hand pumps, medical health and family welfare, women and child development, youth welfare, social welfare, livestock department, agriculture department, and Panchayati Raj department, particularly the village level functions and properties. Panchayats were also entrusted with the supervision and maintenance of primary schools, upper primary schools and mother and child welfare centres. Panchayats are also assigned the work related to old age pension, widow pension, disabled pension and all sorts of scholarships. Kshetra Panchayats have also been assigned the work related to implementation, monitoring and assessment of various programmes of rural development department, in addition to supervision of primary health centre, veterinary

hospitals at block level and seed centres and marketing godowns under the public distribution system.

It, in fact, is in the hands of *Gram Pradhan*-led committee to identify the beneficiaries of various welfare schemes. Another important task which is looked after by a committee led by *gram pradhan* with *lekhpal* as secretary is the land management at village level. It involves the *gram samaj* land and the committee resolves the dispute if arisen.

Another aspect which is often ignored in the process specially the panchayat polls is the women empowerment. The urban India may lack it in some way or another but the reservation of women in Panchayats have brought them forth in the process of decision making. Over the last two decades, there has been a steady growth in education and awareness among the rural folk, the credit of which largely goes to women empowerment, mainly through Panchayati Raj system where women are rubbing shoulders with the male counterparts in a big manner.

It is pertinent to trace the history, growth and evolution of Panchayati Raj in Uttar Pradesh where 74 of 75 districts are going through the Panchayat polls in the state.

If we look at the chronology of the events in the field of panchayati raj in Uttar Pradesh, it can be divided into six phases-

First Phase (1947-1952-53)

United Provinces Panchayat Raj Act 1947 dated December 7, 1947 was signed by the Governor General and the setting up of Panchayats started from August 15, 1949. The new constitution of the country also emphasized on this system as Article 40 of the Directive Principles of state policy in the Constitution instructed that the state should take necessary steps to establish Panchayats. As many as 35,000 Panchayats and eight thousand Panchayat courts were set up, which represented the then population of 5.4 crore in UP.

Second phase (1953-54 to 1959-60)

A committee of elected legislators was formed to suggest ways and means to enhance the activities of Panchayats and their role in various developmental works. The committee recommended amendment in Panchayat Act which was implemented in the second general election to Panchayats which took place in 1955. After delimitation, the number of Panchayats

in the state was about 72000 and the Panchayat courts which were renamed as Nyaya Panchayat grew to 8585. The role of panchayats in Rabi and Kharif movements was pro-active which resulted into formation of agriculture panchayats.

Third phase (1960-61 to 1971-71)

The amendment in Panchayati Raj Act was effected which made provision for secret ballot for *gram pradhan*. Panchayats strived to have self-sufficient agricultural production in rural areas and constituted welfare sub-committees. Third general election to Panchayats took place between Feb 10,1961 to Feb 7,1962. On the basis of Balwant Rai Mehta Committee recommendations about principles of decentralization of power, Uttar Pradesh Kshetriya Samiti and Zilla Parishad Act was implemented. The three-tier Panchayati Raj system of *gram sabha*, *kshetra samiti* and *zila parishad* came into force. After election the number of Panchayats was 72233 and nyay panchayats was 8594.

Fourth phase (1972-73 to 1981-82)

This phase saw Fourth and Fifth panchayat polls during this period. Minimum voting age in the Panchayat elections was reduced from 21 years to 18 years. The roots of Panchayati Raj had started gaining grounds. By the end of 1981-82, the number of gram Panchayats in the state stood at 72 809 while 8791 Nyaya Panchayats existed.

Fifth phase (1983-84 to 1992-93)

This was the period during which 6th general election to Panchayats took place. The Panchayat Raj Act was amended in 1988. A very important development took place during this phase which not only boosted the spirit of Panchayati Raj but even otherwise gave new dimension to the society and that was provision of 30 per cent women reservation in gram panchayats. It was also envisaged that at least one Scheduled Caste woman will be there in every village panchayat. The number of women *gram pradhan* reached 930 while as many as 1.50 lakh women members were there in the gram panchayats. By this time, the number of SC women members had reached the mark of 65000 which in itself was indicator of the fact that the system is breaking the shackles of castes. The ambitious Jawahar Rozgaar Yojana (JRY) was launched to provide employment to men and women. The gram panchayats were given the task of implementing the scheme.

Sixth phase (1993-94 to present)

In order to provide Constitutional status to gram panchayats, the 72nd constitutional amendment bill was presented in the parliament which was later passed as the 73rd Amendment Bill and came into force in the country in April 1993. In accordance with the 73rd Constitutional amendment, the Uttar Pradesh Panchayat Law (Amendment) Bill was passed in 1994 which came into force from April 22,1994. The United Provinces Panchayat Raj Act 1947 and U.P. Area Committee and District Council Act, 1961 were amended and uniformity in the three-level Panchayats (gram panchayat, kshetra panchayat and district panchayat) was brought while making these provisions.

The growth of Panchayati Raj in Uttar Pradesh was never a no show in the state, instead it always continued to grow from strength to strength. The emergence of rural men and women in rather unconventional fields (for them) like sports, art and culture, politics and even performing arts was just a pointer of empowerment, awareness and education. That is obviously due to the decentralized system of development and devolution of powers.

Indian Institute of Public Administration had brought out a publication in 2013, on Panchayat Devolution Index, relating to the implementation of Article 243 G or the operative core of the 73rd Amendment, which entails the devolution of funds, functions and functionaries. As per this data, Uttar Pradesh is at the mid-point with about 30% devolution achieved. For a state with a population of almost 20 crore, with over a lakh villages and almost 80% rural population, this cannot be termed as a mean feat.

Despite attempts by stakeholders at the central and state levels to strengthen PRIs, they still have a long way to go in becoming strong, inclusive, and democratic institutions in the spirit of the Constitutional Amendments due to various systemic and social constraints. The growth may look slow but there looks no road block. With all the indices in education and health are northwards, the digitalization of the country is already fast-tracked, the youth, in general, has assumed multi-faceted personality, irrespective of his or her social background, the rural India is not going to lag behind in any field.

(The author is a Lucknow-based Senior journalist and former Bureau Chief of UNI)

MAJOR MILESTONES OF PANCHAYAT RAJ SYSTEM

Sudhir Thakre

The Panchayati Raj Institutional set up, especially mandated under 73rd amendment to the Constitution of India is most appropriate manifestation of a democracy envisioned as a system of good governance and inclusive development of the people, for the people and by the people. It is, in fact, a step towards empowering direct democracy as against a representative democratic system practiced under parliamentary and legislative systems of governance.

The vital characteristics of democratic management, viz. bottom up planning, participatory decision making, community led implementation of development programmes and welfare schemes involving all cross section of the society to achieve equitable and integrated growth can be effectively visualized under the empowered Panchayati Raj system mandated under 73rd constitutional amendment, if it is given due opportunity to evolve by the state governments. The 73rd amendment, while mandating Panchayati Raj to empower grass root democracy has left much to the discretion of the individual state governments to devolve this mandate upon Panchayati Raj. It is one of the reasons why the potential so obvious in these provisions is not sprouting into a reality.

However, before taking a stock of these provisions which have a potential to transform the Panchayati Raj regime into grass roots empowered system of good governance let us take a brief review of the stages of the evolution of Panchayati Raj continuum in the country.

Legally mandated formal democratic institutional set up for Panchayat Raj in the country can be traced back, though in a limited format to the British Raj. **Bombay Local Board Act 1884** providing for district and taluka level Local Boards heavily controlled by the bureaucracy was one of the early attempts towards the establishment of Local Self Government Institutions. It is **Bombay Local Boards Act 1923** which provided for directly elected president and vice President on the Local Boards providing for local body election, though the voting rights were too

restrictive. As for Village Panchayats **Bombay Village Panchayat Act 1920** for the first time mandated the formation of statutory Village Panchayat as a wholly elected Body, where again the voting rights were restricted to male adults. More liberal law, providing for voting rights to women was enacted in 1933. However, the formation of village Panchayat was not obligatory under this Act. The major subject entrusted to the Village Panchayat was Sanitation. It seems that sanitation was a priority issue even then as today as obtained through Swachh Bharat Mission.

However, even before British Raj initiatives, the traditional Village level socially and community oriented institutions having participatory/consultative decision making process were existing in different regions in the country. Caste Panchayats, Temple centric decision making bodies, Khap Panchayats, where the leadership was to be chosen on the parameters of social status, stature, age, gender, financial prowess were prevalent. They were not truly democratic bodies but a consultative process was formally observed where the decisions were respected by the community under peer pressure to shun social stigma for a failure to adhere to the decisions. The principle of natural justice was hardly observed. Nevertheless, the threads of community involvement were noticeable.

It is only after the passage of **Government of India Act 1935** conferring more powers, authority and responsibility upon the provincial legislative bodies that they took it to their heart to introduce truly Panchayati Raj Democratic set up in British ruled Indian territories. The **Act of 1938** made district boards truly democratic institution of development in Bombay province while **Village Panchayat Act 1939** conferred similar status upon village Panchayats. It is under this Act that the powers to levy house tax, appointment of secretary to *gram panchayats*, share in the land revenue collected from the jurisdiction of the Panchayat had been conferred upon them. Few other provinces and some princely states subsequently followed and extended similar

democratic mandate as deemed expedient to the village Panchayats.

After independence we do find a mention of village Panchayat under **Article 40** of the Constitution in the chapter mentioning the directive principles of State policy. It only states that the state shall take steps to organize Village Panchayats and endow them with such powers and authority as may be necessary to enable them to function as units of self government. It was left to the discretion of the states to exercise the choice to establish panchayat. Few states did take initiatives establishing and strengthening Village Panchayats. Community Development Block policy of the Central Government also gave impetus to the Panchayat Raj. Under **Bombay Village Panchayat Act 1958**, the Panchayats in then Bombay state (Comprising of Gujarat Area & Maharashtra) were delegated the powers to collect land revenue and maintain land records. But such liberal views quite quickly found reversals when these powers were withdrawn and entrusted back to the revenue department of the state government. After the recommendations of Mehta committee on Panchayat Raj, Rajasthan was the first state to adopt them. However, Maharashtra adopted it with certain modification making district level Zilla Panchayat a most powerful institution, literally **Rural Zilla Sarkar** transferring state govt. staff of many development departments to Zilla Panchayat, particularly the grade C & D Categories. A&B grade Officers were sent on deputation to head district level Zilla Panchayat & block level Panchayat Samitee departments. However, the powers, authority & responsibility delegated in 1962 onwards had been gradually taken back and by 1972, after the formation of **District Planning and Development Council (DPDC)** headed by one of the state ministers, reduced Zilla Panchayat president only to a member in DPDC. (The minister in charge of the district has a designation as a Guardian Minister) All the Members of Parliament and Members of State Legislature from the district were included in the DPDC. The development planning authority got transferred to state government. through DPDC, diluting the role of Zilla Panchayat in development programmes. Add to this, the election of the Panchayats at all the three tiers were not held for 13 Years and after the orders of the Court, administrators were appointed superseding the Zilla Panchayat bodies.

The scenario in other states was also not much different. The faith in the strengths and potential of Panchayat to perform the role of the democratic development planning policy and programme implementation agencies was systematically made to dwindle in public perception by state level political leadership and bureaucracy. They did ensure that the state authority not be weakened at any cost.

It is only after 73rd Amendment to the constitution of India that the Panchayat Raj has obtained a robust constitutional status providing for pan-India uniformity in structure, functions and responsibilities entrusted to them at all the three tiers as made mandatory under the amendment. However even after 73rd amendment there still exists a vast difference in actual devolution of Funds, Functions and Functionaries to the Panchayati Raj Institutions in the states as the operationalization of some vital provisions, especially the transfer of the subject listed under Schedule XI appended newly to the Constitution has been left to the discretion of the States. The transfer of subjects, the extent of authority to be endowed, the authority to impose taxes, assigning share in the taxes levied by the states, extent of grants in aid has been left to the will of the legislature of the state as it is only under the law enacted by the legislature that the amended provisions of the constitution could be given blood and flesh. Most of the state governments have shown a direct or tacit reluctance to enact the laws lest they lose their powers to appease people & make Panchayat Raj bodies their potential competitors in this endeavor. Other provision to conduct elections regularly, providing for the reservations for women/SC/ST/Backward Class of Citizens, Constitution of District Planning Councils dominated by representatives of Panchayat Raj Institutions and Municipal bodies, appointment of Independent State Election Commission have been made mandatory. As a result though the elections are being held quite regularly, the inadequate flow of funds, delegation of sufficient authority and non transfer of functions is not allowing the Panchayat Raj bodies to perform to their fullest potential.

No doubt some states like Kerala, Maharashtra, West Bengal, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, have taken efforts to follow the path laid down under the 73rd Amendment to a great extent in respect of financial, administrative and functional transfer

of the authority to the Panchayats. The fruits of these devolutions are now being noticed in these states. Other lagging states also need to come forward to ensure the spirit of the 73rd Amendment is implemented faithfully.

The ministry of Panchayati Raj government of India evaluates the states as to the extent of devolution made by them to the Panchayati Raj every year. The states are ranked on the basis of the Devolution Index computed in terms of transfer of Funds, Functions & Functionaries to the Panchayats as envisaged under the 73rd amendment, so also the voluntary devolution made beyond the Constitutional provision. However, some states are repeatedly getting higher ranks alternatively in last 4-5 years. Other states have to emulate these states if pan-india scenario of Panchayati Raj Institutions empowering grass root democracy is expected to become a reality.

Let us evaluate some of the features embedded in the Constitution & the independent initiatives taken by some of states of their own volition complimenting 73rd Amendment to make Panchayati Raj Bodies the sentinels empowering grass roots democracy. Gramsabha, comprising of all the voters in the Village Panchayat area is accorded a Constitutional status and it is deemed to be a Supreme Authority in the Village Panchayat. The slogan coined by the proponents of grass root decentralized direct democracy village management and believers in participatory decision making process is **“Lok sabha Desha Me, Vidhansabha Rajya Me, Gramsabha Gaon Me”** (Loksabha at national level, Vidhansabha at state level, *Gram Sabha* at village level.) This comparison may need a clarification that while Loksabha and Vidhansabha are Representative Democratic Bodies where elected representatives decide the issue on behalf of their electors (Voters) Gramsabha is an example of a body invoking Direct Democracy where decision are discussed, debated and resolved by all the voters. It is the best example to put fourth how Panchayat Raj Institution are empowering and nurturing democracy at cutting edge. Some states have further strengthened the system to enhance gender inclusiveness and effective participation of the women in decision making process by making a statutory provision to organize a separate women sabha before the gramsabha and the decisions taken in Women Sabha to be either

endorsed by the generate *Gram Sabha* or they are to be rejected the complete justification is required to be recorded in the proceedings. Some states have given exclusive power and final authority to Women Sabha for certain vital issues like closure of a liquor shop in the village. government authorities are under legal and moral obligations to close the liquor shop once the resolution is passed without disputing the merit of the decision.

Further, decentralized decision making, especially in tribal areas is ensured by organizing Pada, Palli or Basti Sabhas. Provisions of fifth Schedule of the Constitution confers lot of authority to PESA (Panchayat Extension to Schedule Area) areas under that statute. Some of the provisions statutorily mandated to be applicable to tribal areas, likes obligation to obtain the permission of *Gram Sabha* to extract minor minerals, disposal of **Gairans (Pasture Lands)**, sharing of minor forest produce, closure of community **water** bodies, a requisition of community land for development proposes have been voluntary extended by some states to non **schedule** / non tribal **areas** too, to empower **grass root** democratic decision making. To ensure transparency in selection of eligible, needy & deserving villagers only for availing the benefits of welfare schemes & programmes like housing, Land Patta distribution etc, gramsabha is given the authority to decide beneficiary selection.

It need not be denied that the actual procedure might be getting manipulated or **circumvented** because of lack of full information & knowledge, dominance of well offs, political rivalties, vulnerability of weaker sections, but these are the areas which can be dealt by a strong political will, bureaucratic interventions, capacity building of the elected functionaries of the Panchayat and community resolve. The system is in place. It is the will to operationalise the system by sensitizing the people which needs to be invocated. Slowly but certainly it will happen but we have to believe in the people.

The Constitutional provisions under 73rd Amendment which is obligatory upon the states to follow is the conduct of timely & periodic elections for all the three tiers of the Panchayat at District, Block and Village level. The constitution also mandated that at least 1/3 seats at all the three tiers should be reserved for women. Within the women reservation quota, seats are required to be allocated

for SC, ST, & OBC women in proportion of the population of the respective **category** in the state. In scheduled tribal areas special provisions have been prescribed under a separate statute viz. **Panchayat Extension to schedule Area Act (PESA)**. In PESA areas minimum 50% seats are required to be kept reserved for the tribal irrespective of their population in the area of the Panchayat and allocation of seats increases in proportion to their actual population if it exceeds beyond 50% of total population.

The reservations is not confined to the seats of the members on the committees of the Panchayat at all the three tiers but it is also extended to office bearers like Presidents of Zilla Panchayat, Chairpersons of Block Panchayat and Sarpanch/ Mukhiyas of the Village Panchayat. The reservation is provided for women SC, ST and OBC categories some state like Maharashtra, Gujarat, Bihar have gone ahead and provided for 50% reservation on the committees as well as for office bearers for the women.

The practice of nominating members on the committees at all the three tiers of Panchayat in vogue before 73rd Amendment has been totally done away with. However ex-officio nominations for Members of Parliament, Member of the Legislative Assembly elected from the area of the Panchayat is left to the discretion of the states Maharashtra decided not to involve MPs, MLAs in the affairs of the Panchayat though a committee of the members of the state legislature (MLAs) namely Panchayat Raj Committee oversees the overall functioning of the Panchayats at Zilla and Block level. Many states,

including Maharashtra also decided not to permit contesting of the election at Village Panchayat level on political party lines as the subjects to be dealt by Village Panchayat and implementation spirit and motivation hardly gets impacted by political party's ideological moorings.

It is observed worldwide in advanced democracies that Local Self Governments, given an opportunity perform better than centralized management by sovereign states, especially with regards to day to day activities affecting the lives of citizens most of which are included in schedule XI in our Constitution as well.

In short, Constitution has put in place the institutional structure and systems for the efficient operationalisation of grass roots democratic management and governance. In last 20 years Panchayats have come of age. They can do yeoman service to imbibe, inculcate and institutionalize the democratic local management in the country. Let the state governments believe in their strengths to bring about transformation in the lives of the masses and give them full opportunity to empower the grass root direct democracy in rural India. It will be an appropriate tribute to the Father of the Nation, Mahatma Gandhi, who dreamt of each village becoming a Republic, on his 150th birthday falling on 2nd October 2019.

(The author is former IAS officer and has served as Secretary, Rural Development & Panchayati Raj, Government of Maharashtra)

Nearly 95 lakh toilets built during the first year of Swachh Bharat

Surpassing the target, within one year of Swachh Bharat Mission's launch, about 95 lakh toilets have been constructed across the country against the target of 60 lakh toilets. Union Minister for Rural Development, Drinking Water and Sanitation Chaudhary Birender Singh has disclosed this in New Delhi recently while launching a Coffee table book on Swachh Bharat.

States like West Bengal, Karnataka, Rajasthan and Maharashtra have taken the lead in construction of individual household and community toilets and these states may achieve the target of Open-Defecation Free status in 2017 or 2018, well ahead of the target of 2nd October, 2019.

The Centre is committed to driving a pan-India mass movement towards improved sanitation and this is only possible through the collaborative efforts of people across the country.

Rural Development Ministry has been encouraging devolution of the responsibility of sanitation promotion, upgradation and management to Gram Panchayats by giving flexibility to the states.

Swachh Bharat Mission was launched on 2nd of October last year as one of the largest national campaigns to make the country open defecation free in five years.

WOMEN AND PANCHAYATI RAJ SYSTEM

Sarita Brara

Today there are more women in Panchayats than the stipulated 33 per cent and many states have raised women quota to 50 per cent. Bihar was the first state to do so and 54 per cent of elected representatives of PRIs in Bihar today are women.

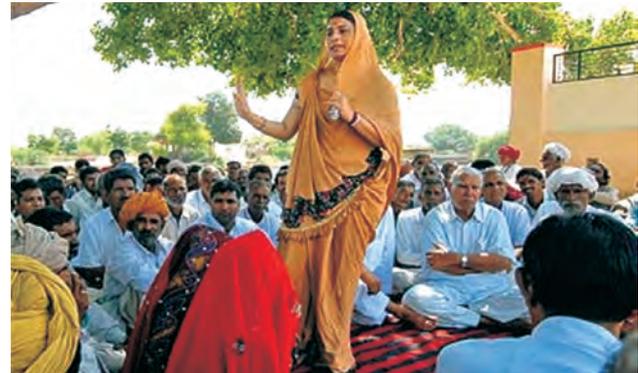
In June this year a landmark judgment by the High Court in Shimla, ruled that daughters are entitled to equal share in the family property, and can't be discriminated on the basis of their gender. It was Rattan Manjri, former Panchayat Pradhan from Kinnaur, who is from Himachal Pradesh, Rattan Manjri says, the leadership qualities that she acquired as head of a Panchayat Gram helped her launch a relentless campaign against discrimination of women in the tribal belt, who were denied their share in the ancestral property.



"It was my election as *Pradhan* of the Panchayat, first in 1981 that gave me the courage to question the discrimination against women and the denial of their rights."

Rattan Manjri, was elected *Pradhan* several times, and is now chairperson of Mahila Kalyan Parishad, (a women's rights group in Kinnaur,) which took the movement forward on securing women rights and against the discriminatory custom as well as educating women on issues that concern their well-being. Rattan Manjri became a *Pradhan* much before reservation for women in Panchayats came into effect. Before the 73rd amendment was passed, there weren't many women in Panchayats and most of them were nominated. Majority of them belonged to upper clan of the society or were related to political bigwigs.

Even as the Bill on the 73rd Constitutional amendment on reservation for women was being debated many politicians were skeptical whether women in villages would come forward to fill the stipulated 33 per cent.



Their doubts were, however, belied. Today there are more women in Panchayats than the stipulated 33 per cent and many states have raised women quota to 50 per cent. Bihar was the first state to do so and 54 per cent of elected representatives of PRIs in Bihar today are women. In Himachal Pradesh, there are over 57 per cent women in the three tier Panchayati Raj Institutions, 451 women have been elected from the unreserved seats in the state. Several other states including *Uttarakhand*, Tripura, Madhya Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Kerala Maharashtra and Rajasthan have reserved 50 per cent seats for women in panchayats.

There is no doubt that reservation for women in Panchayats, opened the door for their empowerment at the grassroots level. As the Centre for Women's Development Studies in 1999 revealed, 95 per cent of women surveyed felt that they would not have been elected had it not been for the reservation.

So the reservation for women in PRI's became crucial for facilitating first-time entry into politics for over 80 per cent of the elected women. Also, reservation was critical for the disadvantaged groups, Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes.

"In a Gram Panchayat with just 80 to 90 SC voters out of the total 1200, it would have been impossible for a SC woman to become a *Pradhan*, but was possible due to reservation," says, Savitiri of Baheri Gram panchayat, 20 kms from Nalagarh in Himachal Pradesh.

A Dalit woman sarpanch, Nauroti Devi from Harmada Gram Panchayat in Rajasthan has shown that given the opportunity, women even if they belong to a disadvantaged section of society can outwit men in governance at the grassroots level. Nauroti Devi had been working for empowering the marginalised even before she was elected and after she took over as the Sarpanch, she also waged a battle against alcohol mafia. A gutsy woman, she immediately took action when it came to her notice that a man working for a project of the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme was committing fraud, and refused to relent till the person was jailed.

While Nauroti Devi showed exemplary courage, many other women at the helm of Panchayats have also been working to bring about a change in the social and economic status of women, as was done by another woman Sarpanch identified as Neelam from Chappar Gram Panchayat in Jind district of Haryana.

A state with declining sex ratio below the national average and where diktats by *Khap* Panchayat specially regarding the so called honour killing have hogged the headlines, this young Sarpanch has tried to change the mindset of the villagers. It is due to her efforts that families in her gram panchayat now distribute sweets when a girl child is born.

The priority for the Rashtriya Gaurav Gram Sabha Puraskar 2014 winner, Sonalben (Sarpanch) of Javla Panchayat from Vadodara in Gujarat has been propagating on inclusive growth of the village. Efforts towards this end helped establish milk cooperative societies that led to improvement in the economic status of the poorer and deprived classes.

Out of 18 Gram Panchayats selected for Rashtriya Gaurav Gram Sabha Awards, ten of them are headed by the women *Sarpanches/ Pradhans/* Panchayat President or Sabhapati Liruk Panchayat in Arunachal Pradesh is one of them.

Chaired by Nita Liruk, women empowerment has been given a new dimension. The *Gram Sabhas* dealt with a number of issues from human trafficking to the menace of drugs. The Panchayat was successful in restricting entry of narcotics inside the village.

Since the 73rd Constitutional amendment, paved way for reservation for women, scheduled

castes and scheduled tribes, the women participation has increased steadily. The study showed that a sizeable proportion of women surveyed perceived enhancement in their confidence, decision-making ability and respect within the family after winning an election. What is significant, the women and girls related issues gets attention if the Panchayat *Pradhan* is a woman.



There are a number of examples where woman *sarpanches* or *Pradhan* have organized campaigns against liquor consumption, child marriages and other evils in the society. They have not only worked for ensuring development of villages but have also organized self help groups for their economic empowerment. Savitri Devi who became *Pradhan* in 2011, today is much more confident. An ex-*Pradhan* of Mahila Mandal, Savitri says that women and girl centric issues are bound to get more attention when women become *pradhans*. Belonging to a district that has declining sex ratio, Savitri says that involving Mahila Mandals in the campaign against female foeticide has been a priority for her. She says that every single girl in her village has been enrolled in schools. Savitri says that women can be more committed and effective than men, while discharging duties in Panchayats.

It is true that in a male dominated society such as ours, many a times the husbands and men folk in the family of a woman *Pradhan*, take the Panchayat affairs in their hands and the duly elected women become rubber stamps. It is also true that there are cases when female or even male panchayat functionaries from the scheduled castes, specially the *Sarpanches* and the *Pradhans* are forced to act at the behest of the dominant upper caste. But the very fact that women today are winning seats even from the unreserved seats shows that, things are changing. It is not merely their numerical strength but their 'commitment' that is making the difference, says Rattan Manjri.

(The author is a Delhi based freelancer)

ORCHID STATE OF INDIA: ARUNACHAL EXPERIENCE IN PANCHAYATI RAJ

Pradeep Kumar

The State Election Commission was constituted on 18.06.02 and the first PRJ elections as per the new system were conducted in April, 2003. There were 14 Zilla Parishad, 136 Anchal Samities and 1639 Gram Panchayats then, which had increased to 17 Zilla Parishad, 177 Anchal Samities and 1779 Gram Panchayats.

Sentinel of the East:

The Himalayan state of Arunachal Pradesh, the eastern sentinel of India, inhabited by 26 major and 120 sub-tribes and clans, earlier known as NEFA, finds mention in the Kalika Purana and Mahabharata (Prabhu Mountains) where sage Parashuram atoned his matricide sin in Lohit river (Parshuram Kund), sage Vyasa meditated, King Bhismaka set up his Kingdom and Lord Krishna married his consort Rukmini, princess of Bhismaka.

The Britishers exercised control over Assam after the treaty of Yandaboo concluded in 1826 over this largest North East state, spread in 83,743 sqkm sharing border with Bhutan (160 km), China (1,080 km) and Myanmar (440 km) with snow-capped mountains, then known as the North East Frontier Agency (NEFA), created in 1955. But it was created as North East Frontier Tracts (NEFT) by Regulation 1 of 1943.

Though India achieved independence in 1947, the NEFA was administered by the Ministry of External Affairs till 1965 and subsequently by the Ministry of Home Affairs through the Governor of Assam till 1972. The NEFA rechristened as Arunachal Pradesh by then research director



Bibhabasu Das Shastri became Union Territory on 21.01.72 Arunachal a became the 24th state of Union of India on 20.02.87.

Village Council or self-government system: Arunachal Pradesh, also known as ('Land of the Dawn-lit Mountains' or 'Orchid State of India' or 'Paradise of the Botanists'), was largely autonomous. Its inhabitants mostly of Mongoloid race led a strict democratic life through their indigenous local self-government institutions or village councils. These councils tribe-wise are known as *Kebang* (Adi), *Tsho* (Monpa), *Jung* (Sherdukpen), *Mele or Razi* (Aka), *Buliang* (Apatani), *Nyele* (Nyishi), Tai-Khampti-Singpho Council (Khampti & Singpho), *Abbala* (Idu-Mishmi), *Ngoa Wang* (Nocte and Wancho), *Rhung* (Tangsa) etc.

These councils have been adored for their very effective but less expensive system to grant justice through the Gaon Burahs, appointed under the Assam Frontier (Administration of Justice) Regulation, 1945. But the British rule had eroded the system while the Indian Penal Code after the independence was effective only within 500 mtrs of the deputy commissioner's office till recently. Many Collectors, who also act as District Magistrates, refer many litigation to these village councils even today.

The verdicts of the councils after a transparent procedure of hearing both sides are still binding on the tribal society as they still have faith in the age-old system, free from any influence, nepotism and favouritism.

Impressed by the efficacy of the system, Gauhati High Court Chief Justice K Lokur, accompanied by Gauhati HC Itanagar permanent bench deputy registrar PB Dutta and Capital Complex deputy commissioner SB Deepak Kumar, had attended a session of village council (*Mel*) at Naharlagun on 16th Feb., 2012. The *Mel* in its second sitting delivered justice relating to a marriage dispute and awarded a compensation of Rs 1.1 lakh to the aggrieved complainant within a very short time and without involvement of any high-paid lawyers. This cost-effective and socially accepted system, could reduce the huge pending cases in various courts of India. In this manner he had toured many parts of the state to propagate the village council.

It is worth recalling that after listening to All Arunachal Pradesh Gaon Bura Welfare Association president Nabam Epo before inaugurating state's first state level legal aid centre (LAC) in Then Papu village-I on 05.04.12, Then, Supreme Court of India's chief justice-designate Altamas Kabir had underscored the relevance of the time-tested Gaon Bura institution.

"You are part of our judiciary system. No judge could claim to have known all the laws," he said, adding the 1945 archaic customary law was enacted then to solve social problems. Though the (GBs) dispose of many complicated cases with highest 10 sittings at a stretch, it needs a mechanism to make them available for the seekers and even they

could learn at the LAC, while teaching others," justice Kabir had reasoned.

Gauhati HC judge justice IA Ansari said "*aap hazzar sallo se judge ho, hum bhi judge hai* (You are judges for the last thousands of years, so also we)". We have to learn from each other. We do not want to break the GB system. There could be some defect in either system which should be removed to grant justice.

Daying Ering, Deputy Minister in Jawahar Lal Nehru ministry, had headed a parliamentary committee formed in 1964 to study various aspects of three-tier PRIs to be introduced in the NEFA, after the Chinese aggression. In 1965 the Ering Commission recommended to set up Gram Panchayat at village, Anchal Samiti at circle, Zilla Parishad at district, Agency Council at Agency level, which was formalised by enacting the NEFA Panchayat Raj Regulation, 1967 in the Parliament.

Mahatma Gandhi's principle of Gram Swaraj had facilitated the passage of the Constitutional (73rd Amendment) Act, passed in 1992 and enforced on 24.04.93. Subsequent Govt's desire to set up self-governing institutions at grassroot level through reforms was influenced by the dust-gathered report of the Ering Commission.

But the 3-tier system was dissolved on 14.09.97, after the Constitution (73rd Amendment), Act, 1992.

The three-tier PRIs was revived after the first election on 02.04.03, but the Bill enacted by the state Assembly without reservation for scheduled castes as per the Bengal Eastern Regulation Act 1873 which prohibits reservation for non-Arunachlees. But then governor Mata Prasad did not give consent to the Bill. Though, the state government initially promulgated an ordinance giving consent to the 1992 Act, and passed a bill in 1994, excluding reservation for SCs, the Bill was returned by the Union Ministry of Home Affairs in September 1996 suggesting inclusion of reservation for SCs.

The State Election Commission was constituted on 18.06.02 and the first PRI elections as per the new system were conducted in April, 2003. There were 14 Zilla Parishad, 136 Anchal Samities and 1639 Gram Panchayats then, which



had increased to 17 Zilla Parishad, 177 Anchal Samities and 1779 Gram Panchayats. Recently, Zilla Parishad was created for Namsai, Siang and Kra Dadi districts raising the total number further.

The devolution of functions, funds and functionaries (3Fs) along with 29 departments to the PRIs aimed at bottom-up development did not take place as desired though the women had crossed the 33% benchmark of seats reserved for them.

Power Devolution: The elected PRI leaders functioned for two terms without power devolution of 3Fs covering 29 subjects. The Arunachal Pradesh Activity Mapping Order 2007 was issued in Oct 2008 while the executive order on activity mapping on 29 subjects was subsequently notified in the Gazette.

The 29 subjects included agriculture and horticulture; land reforms and soil conservation; minor irrigation water management & water development; animal husbandry & veterinary dairying & poultry; fisheries; social & farm forestry; minor forest products; small scale industries including food processing industries; khadi village and cottage industries; rural housing; drinking water; fuel & fodder; roads, culverts, bridges, waterways & other means of communication; rural electrification & distribution of electricity;

non-conventional energy sources; poverty alleviation programmes; primary & secondary education; adult & non-formal education; libraries; cultural activities; market & fairs; health & sanitation, including hospitals, PHCs & dispensaries; family welfare; women & child development; social welfare including welfare of handicapped & mentally retarded; welfare of weaker sections in particular of SCs & STs, public distribution system & maintenance of community assets.

The national devolution index, a study by Indian Institute of Public Administration instituted by the Central Government, had put Arunachal Pradesh at second lowest position with Jharkhand at the bottom, among all states and UTs in 2013.

Devolution reward: The state government moved faster by devolving powers and providing infrastructures, by conducting capacity building trainings & delegating financial powers – Rs 20 lakh (Zilla Parishad) & Rs 10 lakh to its chairperson, Rs 7 lakh (Anchal Samity) & Rs 2 lakh to its chairperson, Rs 5 lakh (Gram Panchayat) & Rs 1 lakh to its chairperson on 19.02.14 to raise PRIs' status to 5th position in India during 2013-14.

The state government's initiative won Rs one crore for performance on devolution under Rajiv Gandhi Panchayat Sashaktikaran Abhiyan (RGPSA) for 2013-14 through committed exercises which had facilitated availing of the performance grants to panchayats.

Most of the rural development programmes and schemes implemented by the rural development department through the District Rural Development Agencies (DRDAs) headed by the project director were entrusted to the PRIs. The DRDAs were entrusted with the responsibility to implement central schemes, like Indira Awas Yojana (IAY), National Rural Livelihood Mission,

Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) and integrated watershed management programme (IWMP). The PRIs receive funds from the state and the Central governments for managing the administration and implementation of different development schemes.

Highlighting the speedy informed growth of PRIs, Chief Minister Nabam Tuki had told the Assembly in July 2015 that the Union Ministry of Panchayati Raj under the Rajiv Gandhi Panchayat Sashaktikaran Abhiyan (RGPSA) during 2014-15 had released Rs 7.72 crore (90% central share) in November 2014 which had increased to Rs 9.35 crore with 10% state matching share of Rs 1.62 crore.

“We should give more stress on PRIs to further strengthen the grassroot democracy and help them function smoothly by maintaining transparency and good governance”, Tuki had said adding that the CMs Sub-Group of NITI Aayog has already requested the Centre not to abruptly discontinue centrally sponsored schemes, including the RGPSA.

Women beat men: Democracy is endeared to the masses in Arunachal Pradesh for which high voters’ turnout is recorded in all elections. The PRI elections was no exception but the women proved their capacity and influence as ZPMs belonging to the fairer sex had crossed the 33% reservation to capture the Zilla Parishad chairperson (ZPC) position too with Chowang Lamu (West Kameng), Meyuk Cheda (East Kameng), Nabam Aka (Papum Pare), Yaman Bagra (West Siang), Sipi Elapra (Linggi) (Lower Dibang), Heyomati Tawsik (Anjaw), Marina Kenglang (Changlang) and Phezong Wangsa Longding becoming ZPCs of their respective district.

But still the state PRIs have miles to go if Meila Dari Gram Panchayat in Sikkim, a national model is any indication. It has a record annual income of Rs 3 crore and Rs 1 crore from backyard poultry and dairy respectively. Its village administrative centre (VAC) looks like a corporate office is completely wi-fi enabled since 2008 and offers numerous services to 6,333 inhabitants including 3,086 females (2006 census) of seven villages comprising 1,158 households.

It has shown the way by becoming a national model in all aspects to win Rashtriya Gaurav Gram Sabha Award-2011 of the Union PR ministry, the IT Person of the Year-2011 Award while Melli Gumpa secondary school was adjudged the best performing school in 2011 and its health sub-centre chosen as the best performing PHSC in 2011 by the district health society.

The reform process reflected its drawback and contradicted the Gram Swaraj philosophy by not recognising the traditional time-tested system. For example, the highly honoured Chieftain system still prevailing among the Nocte and Wancho communities living in Tirap and Loding districts were not excluded from the process like Sikkim, which had introduced a two-tier system with 50% reservation for women but making two traditional local self-governments (*Dzumsas*) part of it. The state has zilla panchayats and 165 gram panchayat including *Dzumsas*.

Sikkim, which was ranked the best state in India in smaller category states for its outstanding performance in strengthening and developing the PRIs in 2012 to bag Panchayat Empowerment & Incentivizing Scheme Award- 2011-12 (Rs 1.36 crore), has an ambitious plan to achieve ‘Poverty free Sikkim’ by 2015.

Conclusion: It is high time for Arunachal state government to empower the PRIs, particularly the Gram Panchayat to formulate their village development plan to avail the entitled 14th Finance Commission grants of Rs 737.93 crore (2015-2020) under basic grants entitlement for entire Arunachal Pradesh with resource support from other rural centric departments through convergence. The state government has a vital role to fulfil the minimum conditionality for availing the performance grants of Rs 82 crore (2015-2020) under 14th FC. The state government should rise to the occasion to retain the glory of devolution of power to PRIs which is visibly on a downward trend.

(The author is Editor, Arunachal Front Daily and visiting faculty of mass communication in Rajiv Gandhi University)

SMALL RUMINANTS FOR RURAL LIVELIHOOD: DEVELOPMENT IMPERATIVES

Dr. A. Suresh

Sheep and goat (small ruminants, SRs) are among the earliest domesticated animals in India. By providing milk, meat, wool, hide and manure, they contribute significantly to the rural livelihood security. The SRs are reared mostly on an extensive production system, depending on pastures/ grazing lands. Commercial and semi-intensive farming is an emerging system, mainly in case of goats, but has not acquired wide coverage and spread.

Though the small ruminants are raised by all sections of the society, their contribution is more significant for small and marginal farmers and for socially and economically backward sections. Further, the small ruminants act as a means to tide over the income shortfalls, occurring during the times of risky conditions like drought. They can be encashed much easier in small numbers, and thereby functions like a liquid asset. A flock of sheep and goat can be started with low initial investments. The main investment needs are for initial purchase of the animals and construction of shelter. The positive aspects of small ruminant farming needs to be taken into account for further development of the sector, notably in the context of reported farm income distress in many parts of the country. Recognizing the potential of small ruminants in raising rural income and smoothing income fluctuations, many programmes have been initiated by the Central and state governments.

Population dynamics of small ruminants

The SR population in India has increased substantially over the years. This has to be viewed in the context of overall changes in the livestock population. Post-independence, the total livestock population in India increased from 293 million in 1951 to 512 million in 2012 (65% increase) at an annual compound growth rate of 0.92 per cent.

While total bovines (cattle and buffalo together) increased from 199 million to 300 million (at growth rate of 0.68 %) the small ruminants increased from 86 million to 200 million (at the growth rate of 1.39

%). The population change in case of goat has been at the rate of 1.74% and that of sheep 0.84%.

The small ruminants are widespread all over the country. Among states, the largest number of SR population is noted in Andhra Pradesh (AP, undivided), followed by Rajasthan and Bihar. Between the last two livestock census (2007 and 2013), goat population increased in all the states, except in Maharashtra and West Bengal; whereas, sheep posted negative growth in seven states.

Contribution in meat production

Sheep and goat contribute significantly to the domestic meat production. During the period of 1980-2013, the production of domestic meat in India increased by 3.5 million tonnes to reach 6.0 million tonnes. The production of the small ruminant meat increased from 0.46 million to 0.75 million tones.

Export

A part of the small ruminant meat produced in India is exported. In 2014-15, India exported small ruminant meat worth Rs 820 crores. It has been noted that during the recent past the incremental export is more than the incremental production.

Income generation out of SR farming

A primary data based study has been conducted in Andhra Pradesh and Rajasthan to assess the contribution of the small ruminants in the livelihood. It was noted that for an average flock of sheep, the net income (gross income – cost) varied between Rs. 40000 to Rs 50000 (at 2012 prices). The average flock size of goat was relatively smaller, and the variation was quite high. Therefore, the net income varied between Rs 4000 to Rs 30000. The major components of the gross revenue was sale of live animals, sale of wool and dung; while the major cost components were feed and fodder, veterinary care, labour and shearing and transportation of wool. While wool in Rajasthan is an important economic product, the

same is not the case of Andhra Pradesh. However, the net revenue as a proportion of gross revenue is higher for goats, on account of multiple births and higher prices. About 95 % of income from sheep originated from sale of animals, compared to 87% in case of goat, where the milk accounted for 8% of gross income.

Analysis of small ruminant farming in India

The analysis carried out based on the data collected from the secondary sources and discussion with farmers and developmental agencies is provided below:

Strengths

The small ruminant meat is the most preferred meat item in India. A study conducted by the author on the consumer preference of different meat items in Delhi and Hyderabad has indicated that more than half of the respondents prefer mutton over other meat items.

Out of about 128 million farm holdings in India, more than 85% are of small holding having a size of less than 2 hectares. While purchase of a milch buffalo or cross-bred cattle costs a large initial investment, often crossing the Rs 1 lakh mark, a flock of small ruminants comprising of 20 animals can be started with half of that amount, making it much suitable for small farm holders.

Besides the low investment, the economic returns from the small ruminants are quick. The gestation period of small ruminants is quite short.

Indian small ruminant meat is highly preferred in international markets, owing to the lean meat and mostly organic nature of production.

India is blessed with a large diversity of indigenous small ruminant breeds, suitable to different agro-climatic conditions and feeding practices. Some of them are best of its kind in the world.

India has a network of research institutes catering to the need of the sector. Indian Veterinary Research Institute (IVRI) at Izatnagar, Uttar Pradesh conducts basic and applied research in all aspects of veterinary and animal sciences. Besides IVRI, Central Institutes of Research on Goats (CIRG), Mathrura, UP and Central Sheep and Wool Research Institute

(CSWRI), Avikanagar, Rajasthan; National Institute of Animal Nutrition and Physiology (NIANP), Bangalore and a large number of veterinary and animal science universities conduct research on small ruminants. A National Institute of High Security Animal Diseases Laboratory at Bhopal contributes to the specialised needs.

Weakness

Though the small ruminant sector contributes significantly to the rural income stability and livelihood security, it is fraught with many weaknesses. They include:

Though the advantages of small ruminants in terms of the faster returns, low gestation period, regular income, need for only low level of initial investment are widely recognized by researchers, has not received adequate attention from policy point of view. Therefore, the focus on the small ruminants in terms of their development need is quite inadequate.

Though there are many newer technologies available, its spread and adoption is poor. One important aspect of improving productivity is through improving breeds. One of the major constraints reported by farmers is the lack of elite rams/ bucks. Mostly the farmers tend to use a superior ram for quite a long period of time. Purchase of concentrate feed is adopted by only a few farmers (less 15% on an average).

One major reason behind the poor awareness could be weak veterinary extension system in India. Total number of veterinary extension personnel available in India is quite low compared to the huge size of livestock population. This results in inadequate veterinary care. Farmers tend to depend on non-institutional sources for prescriptions. The study indicated that almost 63 per cent of farmers resort to self-treating the animals; and 44% depends on the advice from the chemical shops. However, more than two-thirds of the farmers resorted to home service by Government veterinarians, highlighting the need for strengthening the public livestock extension system in India.

Traditionally, the developmental emphasis of small ruminants has been on increasing the production, with less focus on the marketing aspect of it. Studies indicate that the small ruminant

markets are not in sync with the time, and needs urgent reform. Most of the animals pass through the traditional markets, which are characterized by non-transparent sale practices, higher commission charges, collusion between commission agents etc. The technological edge gained through better adoption of technologies will be jeopardized at the marketing stage. While there are reforms in agricultural market systems in India, the live animals marketing systems have not been reformed, especially in case of small ruminants, thus adversely affecting large number of marginalized sections of the agrarian community.

The small ruminant rearing depends mostly on the grazing lands/ pastures. However, there is a quantitative and qualitative decline of pastures, making their sustenance on weak basis. Further the environmental consequences of grazing is reported to be high. The field survey indicated that entire farmers depend on the grazing on common lands, with very low level of adoption of concentrates or feeds, that too for breeding rams/ pregnant ewes. Though the semi-intensive feeding practices help gaining higher body weights and thereby better returns, it is not adopted by many on account of two reasons, viz. lack of capital and high prices of feed.

The level of processing of the small ruminant meat is quite low. Most of the small ruminants are exported with minimal level of processing, when opportunities exist for higher level of processing, and finding high end markets.

Small ruminant farmers need credit for two reasons: to start/ expand the flock size and for meeting the production expenditures. However, none of the surveyed farmers indicated availing the institutional credit, not because there is no need for credit, but because of the inadequate access to credit facilities. Many banks have schemes for small ruminant development, but the awareness regarding the same is low. Similar is the case of insurance facilities- notwithstanding many schemes in operation in many states.

Opportunities

The price and income elasticity of demand for small ruminant meat is higher compared to other meat items. A raising per capita income, notably of low income groups would enhance the demand

for the small ruminant meat. The demand increase would be further augmented, if the export market expands. Going by the trend, there is high chance that export of Indian small ruminant meat remains high and even expanding to newer markets.

World-wide there is demand for organic meat, devoid of chemical contaminations. Indian small ruminant production perfectly suits that market segment, as they are raised on an extensive rearing system, with very less chemicals. However, this segment is yet to be developed and exploited.

Indian carpets are highly demanded in export markets. Bunks of the carpets are manufactured by using imported wool, mainly from New Zealand. However, wool from India, mostly produced from Rajasthan is needed for mixing with the imported wool for imparting the desired quality.

Unlike many other crop and livestock farmers, the small ruminant farmers are unorganised. Organising the small ruminant farmers would potentially enhance their bargaining power. However, this needs active intervention by various agents including non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Small ruminant farming can be an important activity of self-help groups (SHGs) as well.

Conclusion

The sheep and goat farming has potential to contribute significantly to the household income. They have several advantages over many other livestock groups. Therefore, there is a need to accelerate the small ruminant development programmes. Towards this, some critical intervention points are identified. They include: (i) faster spread of technologies including feed, vaccination and medicine (ii) intervention of markets of live- animals and their reforms (iii) improving the veterinary extension-system by greater man-power deployment (iv) conservation of pastures/ grazing lands (v) greater access to credit and insurance markets (vi) helping emergence of contract farming (vii) deepening export markets with greater product diversification, etc. With concerted efforts, larger number of farmers can be attracted towards small ruminant farming with higher level of profitability.

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BANANA TISSUE CULTURE-UDIPI IN LIMELIGHT

P. Selvaraj

Needless to say that timely availability of right type of seeds/planting material in required quantity, is the basic and crucial requirement for making agriculture and allied sector profitable. During recent times, agriculture biotechnology which includes plant tissue culture has been accepted globally as a very effective tool for direct application, improving the quality supply of seeds. In order to meet the huge requirement of seeds in a country like ours, private / self-employed entrepreneurs have to join hands with public sector for mass production of quality seeds. It is a myth that only highly educated / qualified entrepreneurs can take up tissue culture. Here is an example, where a couple has established and now professionally maintaining tissue culture laboratory, supplying quality seeds of Banana to various farmers in Kerala, Karnataka Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh.

Shyam Prasad and Prasanna P Bhat had left their home town Putturnear Mangalore, seeking a livelihood through a viable economic activity and reached a small village namely Pethri, Brahmavarnear Udipi, Karnataka. They started a small plantation nursery namely Annapoorna Nursery in 1997 by availing a bank loan of Rs 2.00 lakh. They were selling planting material for Arecanut, Coconut, Spices

etc. from the nursery. After facing issues like diseases, mortality, marketing etc. they took it as a challenge to strengthen the nursery and underwent onemonth training on tissue culture in GKVK Bangalore followed by 15 days training in RUDSETI. In 2008, they expanded the nursery and established a tissue culture laboratory with a total financial outlay of Rs 80 lakh, which included a loan of Rs 20 lakh from a bank and subsidy of Rs 20 lakh from National Horticulture Board and margin money. Today they run the laboratory in a highly professional manner and have given employment to 40 persons. The route to success is traced back through a gist of their activities:

- Small pieces of plant tissues (explants) are collected from selective, high yielding banana varieties (mother plant) and virus index is done from GKVK Bangalore.
- Can be induced to divide and develop into complete plants, producing new shoots to produce large number of new plants.
- They culture 250 to 300 micro plants from single tissue in eight cycles in about eight months period. One cycle is of four weeks duration. Then the plants are grown in green house nursery for about 2 months ie. one month for primary hardening and one month for secondary hardening in poly bags. Thereafter the plants are ready for sale.

- The farm has four Green houses and these climate controlled poly houses / shade houses ensure production of high quality and uniform planting material throughout the year, in all seasons and weather. The total farm size is 10 acre. The capacity of the laboratory is 20 lakh plants and that of the green house is 30 lakh plants.





- They produce many varieties of Banana i.e., G9, Rajapuri, Nendran Red banana and many more.
- The selling price is Rs 8 to Rs 10 for small net pot and Rs 15 to 25 for poly bag plant. It varies from plant to plants as well.
- They give employment to about 40 local educated unemployed youth as well as the migrated labourers from states like U.P. and Bihar. There are 16 skilled staff and 25 unskilled labourers. Adequate care on the welfare of labourers is taken, even by providing space for the kids of the labourers.
- The working environment available to the staff is more suitable to the womenfolk. Besides, the work demands lot of involvement, patience, dedication, and commitment, which complement each other. The farm synchronises with the interest of women empowerment as well as physically challenged persons greatly contributing to the success.
- Recently they have achieved success in tissue culture of pepper, a rare event. They plan to produce 10,000 pepper plant materials by the end of 2015.
- Towards paying back to society, they supply about 10,000 seeds free of cost to schools, old age homes and public parks.
- Further, the farm has an innovative “Plant bazaar” selling medicinal plants, Spices (clove, Nutmeg, cinnamon), Mango, apple, grapes, jack fruit, Guava, Lemon, sappota and Udupi jasmine. In all, the nursery sells plant seedlings of 200 varieties of horticulture, floriculture, fruits, spices and ornamental plants.

- They sell the seedlings to the local nursery as well as to traders on bulk procurement. There is good market in Kerala, Bangalore, Chennai, and Hyderabad. The State Government farms also procure seeds from this unit regularly.



- The best part is that they are interested to train and encourage other farmers in tissue culture. Shyam Prasad is a visiting faculty for many farmers training centres. He is also advocating timely repayment of bank loans.

Conclusion

From this success story, the learning points for the farmers / educated unemployed youth / entrepreneurs, is that the tissue culture and Plant Nursery are potentially viable and successful activities. With dedication and commitment, it is easy to achieve success, even without professional degree. They can become employment givers than employment seekers. The learning points for the bankers are that they need to extend financial assistance in full and all time for the regular customers, like a family doctor. Regular follow up and monitoring will not only retain the customers, but also ensure timely repayment and increased volume of business, creating a win-win situation. This is a replicable model for bank finance. The third and bigger dimension is the availability of good quality seeds/ planting material for the farmers of our country, ensuring high profitability, making farming as a noble and profitable profession besides combating rural unemployment.

(The author is Deputy General Manager and faculty member in Bankers Institute of Rural Development, Mangalore).

IMPACT OF MICRO-CREDIT AMONG MINORITIES

Dr Shankar Chatterjee, Dr G.V. Krishna Lohi Das

Micro-credit has great importance in the lives of low income earning villagers widely known as below poverty line households (BPL) and micro-credit can create considerable impact to scale up quality of life, if BPL households are in self-help group. In 1999 by merging six programmes Swarnajayanti Gram Swarajgar Yojana (SGSY) was launched. The programmes were Integrated Rural Development Programme (IRDP), Development of Women and Children in Rural Areas (DWCRA), Training of Rural Youth for Self Employment (TRYSEM), Supply of Improved Toolkits for Rural Artisans (SITRA), Million Wells Scheme (MWS) and *Ganga Kalyan* Yojana. SGSY moved from individual approach to group approach by following Prof. *Yunus's* Grameen Bank approach.

Although SGSY continued for 13 years from 1999 to 2012 its implementation was not satisfactory. One of the major issues was that uneven mobilization of rural poor as well as uneven formation of SHGs across the states and other inadequacies, inter alia were insufficient capacity building of the beneficiaries (Swarajgaris), low credit mobilization, lack of dedicated persons to implement the Yojana etc. Considering all these, based on Prof. R. *Radhakrishna* Committee's Report, SGSY has been restructured as National Rural Livelihoods Mission (NRLM). On the other hand to attain inclusive growth, based on Sanchar Committee's recommendations 15 percent of fund was earmarked for minorities under SGSY and accordingly from 2006-07 the same was implemented. It is pertinent to mention here that the minority communities are those who have been notified under section (2) of the National Commission for Minorities Act of 1992 and accordingly Muslim, Christian, Sikh, Buddhist and Parsi are minorities and later on Jain has been included.

The Committee recommends that "the coverage under Public Programmes should be extended to include more schemes. A fund should be kept for training of minorities under its Entrepreneurial Development Programme. Such

programmes should not only aim to improve skills of artisans in traditional occupations but also re-equip them with modern skills required to face the adverse effects of globalization in their area of artisanship. Given the substantial presence of minorities in these occupational groups special attention should be given to them. While the available data is inadequate, there is a widespread perception that the participation of minorities in the Self Help Groups (SHGs) and other micro-credit programmes is very limited. A policy to enhance the participation of minorities in the micro-credit schemes of NABARD should be laid down. This policy should spell out the intervention required by NABARD through a mix of target and incentive schemes based on the population percentage of Muslims in the village in order to enhance the participation of Muslims in micro-credit. The implementation of such schemes may need to be tailored to specific situations".

Considering the economic backwardness of minorities particularly Muslims, under SGSY out of total fund meant for SGSY, 15 percent should be spent for the minority community from 2006-07 onwards.

According to the guidelines 15 percent of the benefit (Revolving Fund & subsidy) should reach minorities but only in 2011-12, the quota could be achieved by touching the figure 16.30 percent and in the year 2008-09, the data was close to 15 percent.

After 2008-09, assistance extended to the minorities scaled down for subsequent years. And again went up in 2011-12 with the achievement of 16.20 percent.

SGSY at Banaskantha, Parbhani and Birbhum districts:

To get an idea about the impact of micro-credit including credit under SGSY (NRLM was in nascent stage when the study was carried out) among the members of Self-help Groups (SHGs) of minority community, a study was conducted at *Banaskantha* district of Gujarat, *Parbhani* district of Maharashtra and *Birbhum* of West Bengal as part of NIRD & PR study as all the three districts were

minority dominated. For this study the persons who were benefitted were directly contacted through a schedule specifically designed for the purpose. Although data were collected @ 75 beneficiaries as part of NIRD & PR study from each district, in this analysis focusing on women only 209 women beneficiaries have been included for the analysis and district wise break up is – *Banaskantha* (72), *Parbhani* (62), *Birbhum* (75).

Field Findings:

Beneficiaries' age, number of children and disabled members:

Age is an important factor for carrying out income generation activities. With the attaining of elderly age, a person may not be able to work enthusiastically like a youth. The age group data reveal that in all the three districts most of the beneficiaries were in the age bracket of 18 to 45 years. While looking at district wise data it is observed that at *Banaskantha*, about 85 percent beneficiaries was in the age group of 18 to 45 years, same for *Parbhani* was 75 percent and in *Birbhum* around 98 percent was in the age bracket of 18 to 45 years indicating more youths that too women belonging to minority community had been taking up self-employment activities. Literacy among the beneficiaries was 44 percent at *Banaskantha* followed by *Parbhani* 31 percent & *Birbhum* 11 percent. While the number of children is concerned, it is observed that average size of children was 3 at *Parbhani* and 1.6 at *Banaskantha* and same (1.6) was also at *Birbhum*. Average number of children going to school works out as 1.2 both at *Banaskantha* and *Birbhum* and the same was 2.7 at *Parbhani*. The study thus reveals that all the children of school going age were attending school.

Although under SGSY, three percent assistance was earmarked to the disabled persons i.e. person with disability but in this study in none of the three districts no disabled members were found. However, among the families of beneficiaries, in three families at *Banaskantha* had disabled members, *Parbhani* had highest number as seven families had disable persons and *Birbhum* with two was at the bottom of the list.

Landholding:

Land holding size is an important indicator of

Table 1: Physical and Financial Progress of Minorities under SGSY from 2006-07 to 2012-13

Years	Total SHGs Swarojgaris Assisted	Minorities Swarojgaris Assisted	% age of Minorities Swarojgaris Assisted
2006-07	14,72,066	60,494	3.58
2007-08	11,54,269	1,42,399	8.38
2008-09	14,70,032	2,75,121	14.78
2009-10	17,36,214	2,41,866	11.60
2010-11	17,43,726	2,44,225	11.57
2011-12	14,68,796	2,73,355	16.30
2012-13 (Nov,12)	4,07,492	39,212	8.95
Total Average	1,31,37,995	12,76,672	11.04

economic situation of the members of SHGs and when SGSY was in operation all marginal and small farmers were entitled to form SHGs as well as to access assistance from the Government. Keeping in mind, land holding data were collected from the beneficiary-families. The data divulge 93 percent households did not have any agricultural land at *Banaskantha* followed by *Parbhani* (75%) and *Birbhum* (53%). Against the backdrop 47 percent had agricultural land (up to 2 acres or less) at *Birbhum*, followed by 25 percent at *Parbhani* and *Banaskantha* 7 percent.

Savings and Revolving Fund, Matching Grant & Cash Credit Limit (CCL):

It is mandatory to each SHG member to save money which not only enhances capital reserve but promotes fraternity feeling among themselves. The data in this regard divulge that the minimum monthly saving was to the tune of Rs. 20 per beneficiary at *Birbhum* and maximum was Rs 100. Similarly minimum and maximum saving per member per month at *Banaskantha* were Rs.30 and Rs.50 respectively. And for *Parbhani* the figures were little better as minimum was Rs 75 and maximum was to the tune of Rs. 100. To scale up corpus fund of SHG, there was a provision of Revolving Fund as one time grant (RF) which enables the SHGs to share more money for internal lending. And as credit, Cash Credit Limit as loan (CCL based on savings of SHGs) was given to the SHG. Thus each SHG could accumulate substantial corpus fund. In view of this,

RF and CCL may be considered as a great boon for the SHGs. According to SGSY Guidelines, RF should be minimum of Rs. 5,000 and Rs. 10,000 maximum for each SHG. And in some cases RF may go up to Rs. 20,000 in multiple doses. The study reveals RF at *Banaskantha* for each SHG was hovering around Rs. 9,000 and CCL was Rs. 10,000. In case of *Parbhani* average RF was Rs. 12,000 and CCL Rs. 7,000. On the other hand for *Birbhum*, average RF was Rs. 10,000 and CCL was Rs. 11,500. Thus it is evident that much difference among RF and CCL was not observed in the study areas.

An attempt was made to get an idea about the loan amount borrowed from by each member from all sources and also from time to time. A rough calculation shows average loan borrowed by each member hovered around Rs 11000 at *Banaskantha*, for *Parbhani* same was Rs.13000 and at *Birbhum* the average amount borrowed was Rs 14000. Regarding repayment of loan, the study portrays glossy picture as timely repayment at *Banaskantha* was 100 percent and the same was 87 percent at *Parbhani* and 94 percent at *Birbhum*.

Income of the families from all sources:

In all the three districts under the study an attempt was made to work out the total income. It was observed that in addition to earning through farming or through selling of labour, business was another source of income for many. The major business activities *interalia*, included stationary shop, grocery business, puffed rice making, paddy selling etc. Further, many women at *Banaskantha* informed that for any Muslim festival or family function in the village they were given the order to make hand-made bread (*roti*) as they were endowed with such skill, and thus additionally they could earn some income. It is pertinent to mention that while discussing about the income it is not easy to get net income of the beneficiaries as except pay-slip (which government staffs get) income in true

sense is not maintained with proper record. Even then an attempt was made to get an idea about the total income derived from various sources by the family as may be seen in the following table.

Other Issues:

By forming SHG, persons social condition had improved to a great extent. General awareness about rural development schemes like MGNREGA, etc. was quite high as members in the meetings used to discuss in this regard. Moreover, spending on non vegetarian items was increased as well as increase in frequency. And another notable point is that women who earlier used to stay at home and were doing household works, after forming SHG were not only discussing with other women about their issues but also raises their problems to the officials. Thus, they were felt empowered also.

This study covering 209 women beneficiaries who were under the umbrella of SHGs has revealed that micro-credit has made a difference in their economic as well as social life. It is observed that income of the beneficiaries not only went up, but beneficiaries' social condition improved as they were sending their children to school, gender disparity was negligible, migration was at low ebb, child labour was virtually absent etc. Moreover, they could afford sanitation, electricity etc. The SHG members were confidently borrowing from different sources such as from the corpus fund, banks etc and felt empowered as they came under the umbrella of a group. Even many members reported that they used to participate in the process of decision making in their families which earlier was a day-dream for them. All these were possible because of SHGs' formation by the women of minority communities.

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