

Role Of Media And Problems: Functioning Of Panchayati Raj Institutions

**** Dr Shashi Punam,**

Associate Professor & Head, Department of Social Work, Central University of Himachal Pradesh,

*** Ms Anjana Gautam,**

Research Scholar, Division of Humanities and Social Sciences, Career Point University, Hamirpur, Himachal Pradesh

Abstract

Decentralization is a process by which power is reorganized among institutions of governance at central, regional and local levels. Decentralization is an important tool through which democracy is truly represented and actualized. The decentralization decision-making process has to ensure public participation at the grassroots level. Decentralization of power to local authorities is the most effective way to empower people. Panchayati Raj institutions are known as local self-government which is to empower the weaker sections of the society by providing infrastructural facilities and to initiate the development process at the grassroots level of rural India, where only India lives.

Through Article 243-D of the 73rd Constitutional Amendment, the Government of India granted equal powers to all Panchayati Raj in the country. However, Panchayati Raj institutions face various problems. However, the media can play a vibrant role in bringing the said issues to the attention of the public and help resolve the miscommunication and issues that arise due to the functioning, non-functioning and over-functioning of the PRI bodies. The media not only exposes the rampant corruption in the PRI but also serves to sensitize the general public. The media has opened a myriad of access to information for the common man. There are many ways in which remedial changes can be brought about in the Panchayati Raj system through the media.

Key Words: *Panchayati Raj System, Decentralization, Participation, Three-Tier System, Web Media, Rural Journalism, Self-Governance, Mobile Journalism, Citizen Journalism*

Date of Submission: 17-10-2023

Date of Acceptance: 27-10-2023

I. Introduction

To ensure public participation at the local level, the Government of India made history in fiscal federalism through the historic 73rd and 74th amendments to its Constitution in 1992. This amendment adds three levels of local self-government to the federal framework. With the passage of the 73rd Amendment Act, the participation of people in the process of planning, decision making, implementation and distribution system in rural India was recognized. The Constitution (73rd Amendment) Act, 1992, which came into force on April 24, 1993, has given constitutional status to Panchayati Raj Institutions (Bates, 2005).

The exercise of the powers conferred on the PRI through the said amendment is subject to several conditions and approvals by the State Government. Many States have also failed to comply with their Panchayat Acts with necessary rules and orders. These shortcomings have made the tasks of standard evaluation of the financial needs of these bodies and comparison of the level and adequacy of fiscal decentralization across states extremely difficult (Mathur, 2017). Despite being well conceived through the provisions, many problems are observed in the functioning of Panchayati Raj Institutions. Institutional frameworks like district planning boards created to accelerate decentralized planning are either not functioning properly or do not prioritize Panchayati Raj institutions. Efforts have been limited to empower the representatives of elected Panchayati Raj institutions with their constitutional functions.

The state and central governments have created separate frameworks or units to implement specific projects on education, health, etc. It limits the role and powers of Panchayati Raj institutions. Consequently, in many cases, PRI representatives have become mere implementers and followers, where the idea was to create them as local leaders leading local development (Venkatesan, 2002).

The media raises all the problems of the public. The media plays its role by highlighting the activities of Panchayati Raj institutions and the problems in local self-government. The role of media in empowerment of

Panchayati Raj institutions is seen as positive and therefore the study of media on Panchayati Raj becomes important.

Objectives

- To know the efficient use of media participation in the Panchayati Raj system in India.
- To study problems related to Panchayati Raj, poverty, unemployment, illiteracy.
- To study the role of local people in Panchayati Raj and the changes in their lives.
- To study the contribution of media and social media in the Panchayati Raj system for participatory development.

II. Methodology

Certain research techniques become important to make any research work better. There is very little study of the functioning of Panchayati Raj institutions and the role of media regarding its problems. Because the development of any nation cannot be the development of the village. Therefore, the study of media in the context of the Panchayati Raj system becomes important. The contribution of various media such as mainstream media, social media and web media to rural society has been studied and analyzed in this research paper. The research attempts to understand the impact of media in Panchayati Raj through historical techniques. It also discusses the problems in rural development and the role of media in solving them through the analysis of the subject matter.

Panchayati Raj System

Panchayati Raj in India is not a new concept but an old concept. Through their presence in rural society in the form of caste-based panchayats in ancient times, today the structure, processes and functions of the PRI system are completely different (**Kumari, 2009**). The father of the country, Mahatma Gandhi advocated Panchayati Raj. He saw public participation through Panchayati Raj. Article 40 of the Constitution in 1950 mentioned Panchayati Raj institutions as the guiding principle of state policy. At the same time, the Government of India had introduced the Community Development Program (CDP) as a pilot in 1952 to facilitate local development. The CDP emphasized seeking to advance expert-driven, top-down development processes. The CDP was not successful even after it had the support of the government, which was due to the fact that under the CDP people were neither involved nor participated in their own development (**TNRD, 2020**).

In January 1957, the government set up the Balwant Rai Mehta Committee to review both the CDP and the National Extension Service and suggest measures for improvement. The committee report had recommended that the government should completely disengage itself from certain duties and responsibilities and hand them over to a body which has full charge of all development activities within its jurisdiction. The said committee in its report had suggested the government to retain only guidance, supervision and higher functions. The committee had suggested a three-tier elected self-government known as Panchayati Raj Institution. After the recommendations were accepted by the Government of India, various states had started adopting the PRI system slowly. In 1959, the state of Rajasthan was the first to adopt it. Between 1959 and 1988, various committees were also constituted for the purpose of studying the PRI system. Finally, Panchayati Raj institutions were officially recognized through the passage of the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act (**Bates, 2005**).

In 1993, institutions of self-government known as Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) were institutionalized for the first time in India. 2023 marks 28 years since the 73rd Constitutional Amendment came into existence. The thought process behind the Panchayati Raj system was to make democracy functional at the local level and driven by the needs and participation of citizens. Panchayati Raj was therefore introduced as a three-tier system driven by decentralized governance, decision-making and local development (**Goel & Rajneesh, 2009**).

The primary objective of the government's establishment of the PRI was to ensure democratic participation. Through this was to better articulate local needs and priorities and make efficient use of local resources. It also aimed to ensure accountability and transparency. However, Panchayati Raj is also facing many problems that need to be solved (**Joshi, 2021**).

Functioning and Importance of Panchayati Raj Institutions

There were two basic ideas behind the introduction of the Panchayati Raj system. The first is that the democratic system could be decentralized by increasing the political representation of different social groups (especially women). Second, it will strengthen by enabling the creation of efficient local institutions. Through the participatory approach, the planning of communities' development could be executed (**Phukan & Majeed, 2018**).

The importance and activities of Panchayati Raj can be understood from the following points:-

Promote Democratic Representation at the Local Level:-In the Panchayati Raj system, the three levels of local self-government, the Gram Panchayat at the village level, the Block Panchayat or Panchayat Samiti at the intermediate level and the Zila Panchayat at the district level promote cooperation, democratic participation and decentralization among the people.

Transfer of Power:- Panchayati Raj Institutions transfer power by both the Central and State Governments to give real power to the Panchayati Raj Institutions. The 73rd Amendment to the Constitution provided for 29 subjects in the 11th Schedule, on which Panchayati Raj Institutions were given full powers to plan, implement and monitor (Joshi, 2021).

Development of Villages:- Without rural development, there is no progress of the nation. Panchayati Raj institutions play an important role in the social, cultural, economic and political development of rural people through local self-government. Panchayati Raj is responsible for improving the standard of living of the rural society and ensuring the overall development of the rural area. Comprehensive changes in the lives of rural society through agriculture, rural and cottage industries, artisans, etc. can only be brought about through Panchayati Raj institutions (Darshan 2021).

Ensure good Governance at the Local Level:-Participation of all and development of all are considered as two important pillars of good governance. PRI plays its role in ensuring both of these pillars.

Decentralization of Democracy:-Elections to local bodies are held on a regular basis. Local self-government elections are free and fair. Panchayati Raj Institute provides representation to women, scheduled tribes and castes etc. Decentralized systems play an important role in ensuring participation of all (Venkatesan, 2002).

Challenges of the PRI System

Absence of effective devolution and inconsistent relationship between the three levels:-

Local Government is a state subject in the Constitution. Transfer of power and authority to Panchayats is left to the discretion of the States. There is a lack of development and infrastructure facilities in the panchayat due to the negligence of the state government. Threetier forms of functional authority do not work better. The psychological tendency on the part of the higher structure to treat the lower structure as its subordinates is clearly the big challenge for Panchayati Raj institutions (Rajadhyksha, 2004).

Disillusionment on the front of structure and functioning:-Panchayati Raj institutions are struggling with casteism, factionalism, corruption and inefficiency. Neglect of processes, political interference by the administration to daily Panchayati Raj institutions, narrow loyalties, concentration of power, encroachment of local bodies by the state government etc. have all been obstacles to the success of Panchayati Raj (Palakrishnan, 2017).

Administrative Problem:-Panchayati Raj Bodies face many problems at the administrative level. Panchayati Raj institutions have to face local administration and its tendency towards politicization, lack of coordination with bureaucracy, lack of proper incentives and promotion opportunities for administrative personnel and indifferent attitude of government employees towards development programmes.

Inadequate grants:-Although Panchayati Raj Institutions have constitutional authority, finance is a major challenge for the work. Lack of funds has also been a hindrance in the conduct of Panchayati Raj activities. The Panchayati Raj Bodies have very limited powers in respect of levying cesses and taxes. The fiscal apathy of the state government is also a major challenge.

Sarpanch Pati Issue:-On Panchayati Raj Day in 2015, Prime Minister Narendra Modi had called for the elimination of 'Sarpanch Pati Culture'. The sarpanch's husband is an inhibitor in the empowerment of women representatives in rural self-government (Deutsche Welle, 2015).

Structural Problems:-Gram Panchayats do not have Panchayat Bhawan, Community Toilet, Lack of space or building for School and Anganwadi Centers is a major challenge. Lack of basic facilities like internet connection, toilets, drinking water, electricity, roads etc. is a major challenge for the panchayat (Goel, 2009).

Shortage of Support Staff:-The Standing Committee on Rural Development headed by Dr P Venugopal observed in July 2018 that panchayats lack support staff and personnel like secretaries, junior engineers, computer operators and data entry operators. It affects rural development and the functioning of panchayats and delivery of services by them (Roopal, 2018).

Unscientific Distribution of Functions:-A defective situation still arises in the Panchayati Raj Scheme as distribution of functions among the structures at different levels has not been done on a scientific basis. The conflation of development and local self-government functions has significantly reduced the autonomy of local self-government institutions (Dandekar & Choudhury, 2010).

Lack of cordial relations between officials and the public:-Government officials hold key administrative and technical posts. These officers include Block Development Officer, District Officer etc. There has been a lack of proper cooperation and coordination between them.

Lack of Ideological Clarity:-There is ambiguity regarding the concept of Panchayati Raj and its objectives. Some see it as an administrative agency and others as grassroots democracy (Palakrishnan, 2017).

Measures to make Panchayati Raj Institutions effective

It is time to move from political representation of local people to devolution of power through Panchayati Raj. The political leadership of any state needs to recognize the importance of PRI and empower it. Panchayati Raj institutions should be empowered not only as implementers of projects but also as planners and evaluators (Mitra, 2001).

The Sixth Report of the Second Administrative Reform Commission (ARC) recommended that state governments should try to encourage local bodies to outsource specific functions to public or private agencies. Only comprehensive and holistic training will be required to implement the Sixth Report of the Second Administrative Reform Commission (ARC). Large institutions, resources and experts will have to be provided for the said work (Suhag, 2018).

In the present digital age, the work of institutions related to various disciplines like financial management, rural development, disaster management and general management can be done easily. Panchayati Raj can be made effective through various software, apps and Aadhaar verification (Mathur, 2017).

Functioning of Panchayati Raj Institutions and Role of Media

Media is considered as the fourth pillar of democracy. The media has a widespread impact in society. The media exposes various corruption from reporting on various schemes run by the state and the center. In addition, various media like Newspapers, TV, Radio and Web media contribute to local self-government through their various programmes, advertisements. The media as watchdogs keep their eyes on the government, officials and schemes. The problems of the general public are also raised by the media and attract the attention of the policy makers.

- Nowadays there are more smartphone users. Therefore, the use of 'Web media' has increased in Panchayati Raj.
- Through MOJO and citizen journalism, local people are reporting their own problems.
- The media also continues to expose corruption in development works and at other levels. After verifying the information that came through social media, the mainstream media gives it space.
- The media has also increased awareness and transparency in local self-government today. Panchayats also now communicate rules and schemes to the people through the media (India, 2007).
- The media serves to make local people aware of their rights and duties.
- Small scale industries, cottage industries and rural startups are highlighted and presented by the media.
- The problems of local self-government are presented with critical analysis by the media.
- New technologies and techniques related to local industry and agricultural activities are disseminated through media coverage.
- The media tries to bring out corruption, nepotism, favoritism and dereliction of duty by public servants in the implementation of programs of local self-government.
- The media offers an analytical interpretation of women empowerment (Phukan, 2018).
- Media gives prominence to issue like domestic violence, dowry, cruelty, rape etc to rural people (Phukan, 2018).
- The media does the work of raising awareness related to sanitation and the health system.
- The media disseminates facts and opinions related to the rural system with impartiality and critical analysis.
- Media also provides two-way communication between readers and various organizations of society (Narula, 2006).

III. Suggestions

- Media houses should make efforts to encourage rural journalism. Such journalists should be hired for the purpose of covering the rural beat who are interested in rural affairs.
- Adequate time slots should be given for coverage and broadcast of local news, especially local news related to Panchayati Raj institutions in rural areas.
- The establishment of community radio should be made flexible to ensure participation in the media by as many local people as possible.

- In addition to mainstream media, social media should be trained by locals. The government should conduct small courses to promote digital literacy so that issues that have not been covered by mainstream media can reach people through social media.
- By making all the people involved in Panchayati Raj technically proficient in social media, people from the principal to the DC be added to a series.
- Universities and governments should be encouraged to conduct research at the rural level (**Darshan, & Kalyani, 2021**).

The media can play a vibrant role in addressing the issues described above by making local people aware of their rights and duties. Therefore, the media can play a strong role in the functioning of Panchayati Raj institutions.

IV. Conclusions

Most of the population of India lives in villages. The real reflection of the country is based on the situation in rural areas. Panchayati Raj Institutions were established for the purpose of ensuring local participation in development in rural areas. The provisions relating to PRI have been implemented by almost all states so far. Local bodies have not yet received full administrative control by the state government. Therefore, PRI faces various problems. In modern times, various information systems are being used to make Panchayati Raj very successful. Various rules, schemes and announcements are being communicated to the people through the media. Various problems in local self-government are highlighted through the media. The media as a living role keeps a sharp eye on the functioning, corruption etc. of the PRI bodies. The extent to which the media was able to play its role in the Panchayati Raj system is a matter of further study.

References:

- [1]. Bates, Crispin. (January, 2005). The Development Of Panchayati Raj In India. Research Gate. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/273979026_The_Development_Of_Panchayati_Raj_In_India
- [2]. Darshan, B.M. & Kalyani, Suresh. (May 5, 2021). https://www.academia.edu/65236144/Social_Media_Participatory_Development_Communication_During_COVID_19_By_Elected_Women_Representatives_EWR_Of_Panchayati_Raj_Institutions_PRI_In_India
- [3]. Dube, M.P. & Padalia, Munni. (2000). Democratic Decentralization And Panchayati Raj In India: Prentice Hall Publications.
- [4]. Goel, S.L. & Shalini, Rajneesh. (2009). Panchayati Raj In India: Theory And Practice.
- [5]. India. (2007) P. (686-689) Publications Division, Ministry Of Information And Broadcasting, Government Of India. Joshi, Mehul. (February 19, 2021). Article 243B Constitution Of Panchayats. <https://theindianconstitution.com/article-243b-constitution-of-panchayats/>
- [6]. Kumari, Anjela. (2009). Encyclopaedia Of Sociology. Vol. 5, Social Inequality-A Brief Study. Alfa Publications. New Delhi.
- [7]. Mathur, Kuldeep & Mathur, Navdeep. (2017). Assessing Administrative Reform In India. Chinese Political Science Review. <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/S41111-017-0053-3>
- [8]. Mitra, Subrat K. (2001). Making Local Government Work: Local Elites, Panchayatiraj And Governance In India, In Atul Kohli (Ed). The Success Of India's Democracy. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- [9]. Narula, Uma (2006). Handbook Of Communication Models, Perspectives, Strategies. Atlantic Publishers & Distributors. New Delhi.
- [10]. Palakrishnan. (September 13, 2017). Whatever Happened To Panchayati Raj? The Hindu Business Line. <https://www.thehindubusinessline.com/opinion/whatever-happened-to-panchayatiraj/article9857848.ece>
- [11]. Phukan, N. Kumar, G. Majeed, M. (2018). Advocating For Change: Promoting Women's Participation And Leadership In Local Governance. https://www.devalt.org/images/L2_Projectpdfs/Research_Study_Report_On_Promoting_Womens_Participation_In_Local_Governance.Pdf?Oid=222