



GANDHIAN VIEWS ON PANCHAYAT RAJ INSTITUTIONS AND THEIR ROLE IN GROSS ROOT EDUCATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract

*Mahatma Gandhi envisioned Gram Swaraj as the foundation of true democracy, where villages function as self-reliant units of social, economic, and political life. Central to this vision was the system of Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs), which Gandhi considered not merely administrative bodies but instruments of people's participation and empowerment. He emphasized that grassroots governance must integrate education as a tool for social transformation, focusing on literacy, moral development, vocational skills, and the inculcation of values like truth, non-violence, and self-reliance. Panchayats, in Gandhian thought, were to play a pivotal role in ensuring **Nai Talim (basic education)**—an education system linking learning with productive work and community needs. By decentralizing authority and entrusting local bodies with educational responsibilities, Gandhi sought to democratize knowledge and make it accessible to rural masses, thereby bridging inequalities. In the contemporary context, PRIs continue to carry forward this legacy by implementing primary education programs, encouraging community participation in schools, and fostering inclusive development at the village level. Thus, Gandhian ideas on Panchayati Raj Institutions underline their role not only in political decentralization but also in advancing grassroots educational development as a pathway to social justice and sustainable nation-building.*

Key words: *Gram swaraj, Nai Talim.*

Introductions.

Mahatma Gandhi was a visionary who emphasized decentralization of power and the empowerment of villages as the true foundation of democracy. His idea of *Gram Swaraj*—village self-rule—saw Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) as not merely administrative bodies but as vehicles of social, economic, and educational transformation. Education, for Gandhi, was the most powerful tool for social upliftment, and he believed that village-based institutions were best placed to carry forward this responsibility at the grassroots level.

Gandhian idea of panchayat Raj institutions

This paper emphasizes Gandhi's belief in revitalizing village life through Panchayati Raj institutions, which are essential for grassroots democratic participation and community development, ultimately contributing to educational advancement by involving villagers in decision-making and fostering local governance. For participatory democracy, enhancing local governance and community involvement Mahatma Gandhi advocated for 'Gram Swaraj' or village self-rule, emphasizing decentralization of power through Panchayati Raj institutions. These institutions play a crucial role in grassroots educational development by promoting self-reliance. He believed in elected village governments to promote grassroots educational development,

Gandhi considered the village as the basic unit of democracy. According to him, real freedom and self-reliance could only be achieved when every village became self-sufficient in its economy, governance, and education. Panchayati Raj, in Gandhian thought, was not limited to political decentralization; it was a holistic system of participatory democracy ensuring people's involvement in decision-making. Gandhi argued that centralization of power alienated citizens from governance, whereas Panchayati Raj brought governance closer to the people. Villages, in his vision, were to function as self-governing republics managing their own affairs, including education, health, sanitation, and economy.

Education occupied a central place in Gandhi's social philosophy. His *Nai Talim* or Basic Education scheme stressed Learning through productive work (*learning by doing*). Education in the mother tongue for cultural rootedness. Moral and character development alongside intellectual growth. Self-reliance through vocational skills. Gandhi believed that every village should be a small republic, managing its affairs independently while cooperating with others. Panchayats were to be the embodiment of this self-rule, enabling participatory democracy at the most local level. Gandhi rejected the idea of over-centralization of power in capital cities or bureaucracies. Instead, he argued that true democracy was one in which power flowed from the bottom upwards, with villages as the foundation of national governance. Panchayats, in Gandhi's thought, were not just administrative agencies but moral institutions. They were meant to instil values of cooperation, justice, equality, and truth in public life.

For Gandhi, education was not merely for literacy but for creating socially responsible, self-sufficient individuals capable of serving their communities. Panchayati Raj Institutions, inspired by Gandhian ideals, play a crucial role in promoting grassroots education. Their functions align with Gandhi's vision in the following ways: Local bodies can assess the

educational needs of their villages and plan accordingly. This ensures schools are accessible, inclusive, and culturally relevant. Gandhi emphasized people's involvement in their own development. PRIs involve villagers in school management committees, thereby enhancing accountability. Local participation ensures that education is responsive to the socio-economic conditions of the community. Panchayats can integrate vocational skills, crafts, and agriculture-based learning into school curricula, making education meaningful for rural children. This reduces dropout rates by linking education with livelihood.

Panchayats play a supervisory role in ensuring teachers' regular attendance, proper functioning of schools, and inclusion of marginalized sections such as women, Dalits, and tribals. Panchayats help in mobilizing community resources—land, funds, voluntary labour—for building and maintaining educational infrastructure. By focusing on literacy campaigns, women's education, and adult education programs, Panchayats help in spreading awareness and empowering rural society. Panchayats were envisioned as the bodies to establish and manage schools that were responsive to local needs. They could design curricula that integrated *Nai Talim* with local crafts and agriculture. Panchayats could bring together community resources—funds, land, voluntary teachers, and local expertise—to sustain schools. This collective effort reduced dependency on external authorities. By being close to the people, Panchayats could ensure that marginalized communities—Dalits, women, and the poor—were not excluded from education. Gandhi believed that Panchayats had a moral duty to ensure equality in educational access. Gandhi emphasized lifelong learning. Panchayats were expected to promote adult literacy programs, vocational training, and awareness campaigns, helping villagers acquire practical knowledge to improve their lives. Local governance meant that Panchayats were directly accountable to the community. This ensured greater transparency in school functioning, teacher attendance, and the effective use of funds.

Gandhi introduced his educational philosophy, known as *Nai Talim* or Basic Education, through the Wardha Scheme of 1937. Its central principle was “education through productive work.” Instead of bookish learning, children were to engage in crafts such as spinning, weaving, agriculture, and carpentry. *Nai Talim* aimed at the development of the “head, heart, and hand.” Intellectual, moral, and practical training were to go hand in hand, ensuring education was both life-oriented and value-based. Gandhi saw education as a tool to promote economic and social independence. By linking education to vocational training, children could learn skills to sustain themselves and contribute to the community. Gandhi stressed that education should break down barriers of caste, class, and gender.

Gandhi envisaged Panchayats as bodies responsible for establishing, running, and monitoring village schools. This ensured that education reflected the real needs of the local community instead of being dictated solely by distant authorities. Villages were expected to pool resources—land for school buildings, funds, voluntary services of teachers, and local materials—to run schools effectively. This community-driven model reduced dependence on external funding. Panchayats were to ensure that marginalized groups—women, Dalits, and the poor—were not excluded from schools. Gandhi emphasized that democracy without social inclusion would remain incomplete. Panchayati Raj institutions were also expected to extend education beyond children. Adult literacy, vocational training, and awareness programs were essential to Gandhi's vision of an enlightened rural citizenry. Since Panchayats were directly answerable to the people, they could ensure proper teacher attendance, regular functioning of schools, and responsible use of funds. This accountability mechanism strengthened trust in the education system were expected to ensure universal access to education without discrimination.

Post Independence Development and Gandhian Legacy

The framers of the Indian Constitution recognized Gandhi's emphasis on village self-rule. Article 40 of the Directive Principles of State Policy directed the State to organize village Panchayats and endow them with powers necessary for local self-government. Balwant Rai Mehta Committee (1957). This committee recommended a three-tier system of Panchayati Raj village, block, and district levels with education as one of their key responsibilities. It emphasized that decentralization was necessary for effective planning and implementation of development programs. Ashok Mehta Committee (1978) It reinforced the idea that Panchayati Raj institutions should be directly linked with development, particularly in education, health, and rural welfare. 73rd Constitutional Amendment (1992) This historic amendment gave constitutional status to Panchayati Raj institutions. Eleventh Schedule explicitly entrusted Panchayats with responsibility for primary and secondary education, adult literacy, libraries, and cultural activities.

The 73rd Constitutional Amendment (1992), which institutionalized Panchayati Raj, resonates with Gandhi's vision. Today, PRIs are actively engaged in implementing schemes like Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, Mid-Day Meal Programme, and Right to Education Act at the village level. However, challenges remain—such as lack of funds, political interference, and capacity issues.

Strengthening PRIs with adequate autonomy and resources can make them effective agents of educational transformation in rural India.

Conclusion

Gandhian views on Panchayati Raj Institutions emphasize grassroots democracy, self-reliance, and community-driven development. His educational philosophy of *Nai Talim* complements this vision by linking learning with life and work. Panchayati Raj, when empowered and implemented in true Gandhian spirit, can serve as a vital instrument for achieving inclusive, equitable, and holistic educational development at the grassroots level. Gandhi's ideas continue to guide India's journey toward strengthening democracy and ensuring quality education for all.

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