



## DEMOCRATIC DECENTRALIZATION INSTITUTIONS AND IMPROVE ITS FUNCTIONS GRASS ROOT LEVEL IN ANDHRA PRADESH – INDIA

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**“The Future of India lies in its Villages”- Mahatma Gandhi**

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### Abstract

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*In India democratic decentralization has grown in importance as it fosters grassroots governance and land mark of socio- political changes and expected from the introduction of panchayati raj system remained largely unfulfilled for long. Particularly the objectives like social equality, gender equity and changes at the grassroots level leadership envisaged as the main objectives of panchayati raj are not achieved in a meaningful manner. There is a need to change the system of planning at all levels in the India. A gradual shift from sectoral planning to area planning the developing appears necessary in the context of people's participation in the planning process in contest, recently in Andhra Pradesh Government took steps towards to give door steps services like womb to tomb public services to given through the system of AP Gram / ward Sachivalayam, its a new system in India and which is depend up on many factors in Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs). In this paper in attempt is made to highlight the problems and issues veiled in the PR Act and present remedial solutions to make this Act, more effective and service in gross root level oriented. The panchayats must be given specific powers to pool resources and undertake integrated local development.*

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**Keywords:** *local autonomy, Peoples Participation, decentralized, radical democratic, power-hungry and differentiation.*

## INTRODUCTION:

The first sign of a healthy democracy is that collective decisions are made by the people who are most affected by them and decentralized administration was indeed one of the most remarkable social and political reforms since Independence. Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIS) in India, the institution of Panchayats has a hoary history, through its truly “Democratic” form is of recent origin. In fact Rippon’s Resolutions of 1881 and 1882 can be taken to be the origin of modern local government in India. Balwantray Mehta Committee were appointed by the Government of India in January 1957 to examine the working of the CDP and NES and to suggest measures for better working but he didn’t given any recommendations directly (November 1957) to establish Panchayath Raj System and he recommended the establishment of the scheme of “Democratic Decentralisation” which ultimately came to be known as Panchayath Raj. However, today face a number of daunting challenges. Across all states there is a lack of genuine devolution of funds, powers, functions and functionaries in Panchayat Raj. Added to that are social challenges that work against the emergence of leadership from marginalized sections of society, such as women, dalits and tribal's. Further, there is a lack of role clarity among Gram Panchayats at village level, Panchayati samiti at block level, and Zilla Parishad at the district level.

The socio-political changes expected from the introduction of Panchayati Raj system remained largely unfulfilled for long. Particularly the objectives like social equality, gender equity and change at grassroots level leadership envisaged as the main objectives of Panchayati Raj were not fulfilled in a meaningful manner. In this regard it was felt that the marginalized groups like women and other backward classes in the society continued to face many hurdles and found it difficult to participate at the grassroots level developmental process.

Shortcomings of the Panchayat Institutions: Some of the shortcomings of the system identified by various studies are as follows: The 73rd Amendment Act does not spell out specific grounds for the dissolution of PRIS by state. This gives scope for the states to dissolve PRIS on political considerations.

1. Uniformity of Panchayati Raj system undermines each state's unique history, people’s traditions and consequent structures of local government.
2. Representation of Members of Parliament and state legislatures is often counter-productive. There are clashes of interest between the legislatures and Panchayati Raj representatives particularly for getting votes.

3. The 73rd Amendment Act does not define the role of political parties clearly. It doesn't mention that political parties can enter the election arena in their formal capacity.
4. The 73rd Amendment Act is silent about the relationship between PRIS and local bureaucracy.

Though the Panchayati Raj system has a number of positive features, the elite control over the system, apprehensions of state level leaders of the challenge to their power and the lukewarm attitude of the bureaucracy have not yet allowed the PRIS to function as real democratic institutions with people's participation. Studies from different states in India show that even though some of them have shown political activism to implement PRI system, the unequal social structure and rigid caste system prevalent in Indian villages coupled with power-hungry local bureaucracy kill the spirit of the system. There are three important limitations, which are commonly associated with Indian decentralization and they are:

Firstly the government bodies that operate within their jurisdiction are part of a federal system, in which powers are defined by a written Constitution, and divided among Union, State and sub-state bodies. Secondly the institutions empowered by Indian decentralization are situated in a long standing structure of public administration, whose interests and nature are not necessarily consistent with the provisions outlined in the 73rd Amendment. And finally, this process has taken place in a context of political transition, in which customs of discrimination and inequality in rural areas are thought to have been challenged by forces arising from the green revolution and other forms of guided intervention.

- **Peoples Participation:**

Participation in the context of development has two distinct interpretations. They are: a) participation as an input to development; and b). as a means of empowering the rural poor to play an effective role in rural development. Thus, participation is recognized as an intrinsic part of the process of development rather than merely facilitator. We need participation because; it helps to increase the acceptability and utilization of the services. It provides additional resources to a field continually facing resource scarcity as community is seen as an untapped resource base by which services can be extended particularly to meet the needs of the under-served. People's participation is essential for development because it helps in breaking down and replacing social, economic and political structures that are considered incompatible with development.

- **Who Participates?**

This question is basically related to the stratified structure of rural society. When we examine people's participation in the context of rural development, we come across three categories of people who are involved in the participatory process, viz., a) the people or the masses who are deprived of the basic amenities and whose well being is to be developed; b) The group of people who are control over the accumulation and distribution of resources. This can be the landlords, the community leaders and the local elites and political leaders and, c) the government functionaries who are the agents of development.

- **Success of Panchayat Raj**

After the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act all states in India initiated the process of radical democratic decentralization. In some states the system has played a vital role in changing the traditional power structure dominated by the local elite bureaucratic network. In other states the new system has led to the empowerment of hitherto marginalized sections of society like women, SC's and ST's. Using the conventional classification of political, administrative and fiscal decentralization, the World Bank's three-volume study of Indian decentralization ranks India "among the best performers" internationally in terms of political decentralization, but 'close to the last' in terms of administrative decentralization.

### **Panchayati Raj Institution in Kerala:**

Some states are implementing Panchayati Raj Institution. For example, Kerala has set a model for decentralized planning with people's participation and an innovative model for allocating funds for Panchayati Raj Institutions. In Kerala, the local self- governments belonging to higher tiers do not have any control over the lower tiers. The Panchayat presidents are very clear about their role; they got check plover for their funds and in providing services, and developing Panchayat plans and implementing them.

The Panchayat presidents take an active interest in the proper running of day- care centers, primary schools, and health sub-centers. They actively' look into the maintenance of buildings housing these institutions, regular attendance of the staff, and other infrastructure needs. In Kerala PRIS have initiated the process of participatory natural resource management, watershed management and adult literacy programmes. In some districts local Panchayat authorities have also introduced training programmes. Participation of women and marginalized communities in the development process has led to their empowerment to a great extent. However, Kerala is also not free from the elite capture of political power at the

grassroots level. Over-politicization and interference of local political party leaders has often affected the functioning of PRIS making them less objective and more partisan.

**\*Panchayati Raj Institution in the Andhra Pradesh:**

"Another state, which has shown initial activism in PRIS, is Andhra Pradesh. Even before the 73rd Amendment Andhra Pradesh had a long tradition of local self- government. So when the Act was implemented, Andhra Pradesh had used the district planning committee provision of the 73rd Amendment to pass decision-making powers to the districts. It has also empowered the Gram Sabha to many out the functions of the Gram Panchayat through numerous committees under the gram swaraj. The Andhra Pradesh Panchayat Raj system is characterized by committee system at the local level managed by members of the Gram Sabha and other higher levels.

However, this system is not functioning well due to lack of awareness among the members and bureaucratic indifference to provide technical guidance to the representatives on the powers assigned to them. Thus, the Panchayat Raj representatives have underutilized the powers and functions delegated to the committees. In Andhra Pradesh the elite capture of the system can be observed where there is no actual representation of the marginalized sections of society even though the Act guarantees it.

Yet another problem connected with it has been the love-hate relationship between the local level bureaucracy and the 'elected representatives of the Panchayat Raj Institutions. They have moved in different directions, due to lack of proper coordination and clarity of functions. Moreover, there is also a tendency towards politicization of the local bureaucracy. The Panchayat system has been implemented with such a pace that the system of governance has not had time to attune itself to these major structural changes. The elite control over the system has not permitted the Panchayat Institutions to work as per the objectives enshrined in the Indian Constitution. The need of the hour is to evolve a comprehensive concept of the Panchayat Raj. For this, the PRIS have to play these important roles:

- The PRIS have to contribute towards strengthening the planning process at the micro level and overall rural development.
- They should bring about decentralization of administrative powers in the sense that they have to encourage self-governance and mass participation in their working.
- They have to improve the access of the masses to the highest level of the decision-making process.

- The PRIS should ensure that poor and marginalized people are empowered and must also protect them from all forms of exploitation.

Panchayat Raj members have to be trained for their new role. This is because they have limited knowledge about the Panchayat Act and its provisions, objectives and functions of Panchayat Raj bodies, the dynamics of rural society and the growth potential of their areas. Bureaucracy has to become more committed to PRIS. This kind of disharmony and politicization affects the legitimacy and spirit of democratic decentralization. Hence there is an urgent need to encourage non-partisan elections and procedures of PRIS.

### **\*Improve the Functioning of Panchayat Institutions:**

#### **1. The Role of Civil Society:**

The Civil society is often understood as a 'sphere' of voluntary action, which sits between the family and the state. Included here would be 'third-party' organizations like domestic and international NGOs, membership organizations like trade unions, farmers' associations, credit groups, water-Management associations, etc., political parties, Mafia arrangements, religious affiliations either formal or informal and firms.

Studies of decentralization suggest two important links between civil society organizations and local accountability. One emphasizes the importance of local mobilization. Drawing on evidence from China and Nigeria, argues that local accountability was highly dependent on the existence of 'mass participation' at the local level. Secondly assertion is that external civil society organizations that which can exist outside of the affected communities. Non-government Organizations, for instance, have been shown to empower poor people by connecting them with a wider circle of allies, with whom they can mount a more effective political lobby. Second, and related to this, they can absorb some of the costs of engaging in political action like transportation, communication and so forth. Thirdly, and somewhat less tangibly, has described as "new conceptions of identity and self-worth." This they can do by encouraging poor people to engage in collective action or by transmitting information about constitutional rights, potential allies and other political opportunities.

Local people require the support of higher authorities within the state, whose power can support and legitimize local forms of political mobilization. Regulations stipulating the inclusion of subordinate groups (for instance, the reservation system in India) can help to ensure that poor and marginalized groups have a voice in local bodies. However, without these forms of support, poor and primarily rural communities are unlikely to join and sustain political movements on their own. This is consistent with a wider literature on

decentralization, which emphasizes the importance of 'enabling regimes' that allow for local autonomy.

## **2. Elections, Parties and Competitive Politics:**

Reflecting on the relatively successful of PR of Andhra Pradesh (India) that accountability required the following supporting factors:

- competitive political parties
- a widely distributed free press and
- A 'professional civil service' in which officials were willing 'to develop a constructive but law abiding relationship with elected politicians.
- strong civil society organizations; public meetings;
- free and fair local elections and a vigorous and accessible electronic media;
- Strong and competitive political parties; and Formal grievance procedures.

Just as elections do not make a democracy, the same can be said of party politics and democratization. The development of a strong and vibrant civil society is also inextricably linked to the political opportunities the state makes available, and the ways in which poor and marginal groups in society exploit these opportunities. This, in turn, highlights the ways in which identities based on class, caste, religion, ethnicity, gender and other social markers affect social mobilization and political voice.

It also poses the question of whether and to what extent political struggles among and between these and other social groupings will lead to stronger forms of civil society and, by extension, more equitable forms of governance. To summarize, international experience suggests three broad conditions under which decentralization has been found to foster more accountable forms of governance under which Panchayat institutions can be made more accountable to poor and politically marginal groups.

These are: An active citizenry, whose participation in broad areas of political life, such as voting, campaigning, attending meetings, running for office, lobbying representatives, etc., serves to counter balance the arbitrary use of power;

1. Fiscal and political support from higher level authorities within government;
2. The existence of competitive political parties whose legitimacy depends at least in part on the ability to support the needs of the poor.

### **\*The Grama/Ward Sachivalayam System for Transparency,Speedy in Gross root Administration:**

The Andhra Pradesh Government has launched its ambitious village secretariat system on the occasion of the 150th birth anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi. Chief Minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy launched the scheme from Karapa village in East Godavari district. The village secretariat system, also known as AP Grama Sachivalayam, is modeled on the lines of Gandhiji's Grama Swarajya concept which aims to decentralize democracy and provide more power to villages.

As of October 2021, 15,004 village and ward secretariats had been established with 1,26,649 secretariate staff on regular basis and 2,54,832 volunteers on outsourcing basis to serve around 3.2 crore people, including home delivery of pensions and monthly provisions. In 2022, Tamil Nadu announced its intention to mimic the village secretariat model by building 600 such facilities in the state to provide administrative offices, a conference hall, and other amenities.

The Grama Sachivalayam system was implemented in Andhra Pradesh, it is a additional support for Panchayat Raj system and with the purpose of decentralizing governance and bringing administration closer to the grassroots level. It aims to improve the delivery of government services to rural areas by establishing village and ward secretariats to address the needs of local communities. These secretariats are responsible for various administrative functions, such as issuing certificates, disbursing pensions, and facilitating the implementation of welfare schemes. The goal is to enhance transparency, efficiency, and accessibility in the delivery of public services to the people at the village and ward level.

### **\*Powers and responsibilities from Union to Gram Panchayat Levels - Review:**

The highest level of Indian federal system is The Central government at has the responsibility to promote effective panchayats at the grassroots level of the federal structure. For a truly rational pattern of devolution of powers to the PRIS, it may be necessary to review the entire gamut of powers and responsibilities from Union to the Gram Panchayat levels. However, in the Indian context, the establishment of a strong Panchayat Raj system has never been a ground for demand for greater autonomy by the states. A strong state does not automatically mean that the state would have an active network of PRIS.

### **\*Functions and Powers - Review:**

A periodic review of the functions and powers that are delegated to the PRIS by the state governments, in me context of the freedom available to a state government for



implementation of programmes in the development field, can also be initiated by the Central government. The Planning Commission itself can initiate the process of activating the District Planning Committees to perform their role in decentralized planning as envisaged under 73rd Amendment. It is possible for the Planning Commission to verify whether the district planning exercise has been scrupulously followed or not by the state government, while finalizing state Plan outlays as a part of its annual exercise. This will also put some pressure on the PRIS to prepare local level plans in time, duly taking into consideration the local needs and aspirations.

**\*Centralized Planning and Local Autonomy:**

In reality, the system of centralized planning which the country has been following for over four decades, severely constrains local autonomy. The limited availability of untied funds and severe restrictions in implementation tend to make PRIS the agencies of the state governments, rather than units of local government. There is a need to change the system of planning at the all India level. While the need to assign national priorities in key areas cannot be disputed, it is desirable that the scope of earmarking by the Planning Commission is suitably reduced so that the PRIS can have substantial untied funds, besides some say in the prioritization which can make local planning more meaningful. The number and scope of centrally sponsored schemes should also be curtailed in terms of both range and volume.

**\*Financial Adequacy and Discretionary Funds:**

Availability of adequate finances and untied funds is necessary for the efficient discharge of functions assigned to any Panchayat. It is imperative that the Central Finance Commission is encouraged to make a liberal use of this provision to augment the funds of the PRIS so that the availability of funds can be linked to the discharge of functions assigned to the local bodies by the respective state governments. A substantial provision of untied grants would also help in implementation of innovative for the benefit of the people by the local institutions. It would also encourage the gradual shift towards area development.

**\*Functions of Panchayats should be clearly specified:**

The functions of each level of panchayats have not been spelt out in detail, especially with reference to the 29 subjects that have been listed in the Eleventh Schedule of the Indian Constitution. Since this has been left to the discretion of state governments, the progress on actual transfer of functions (as distinct from subjects listed in the Eleventh Schedule), there is considerable variation across states in terms of progress. The functions to be performed at each level of panchayats must be clearly identified. The implementation of such functions

would call for simultaneous amendments to subject-matter legislation to enable assumption of such functions by the panchayats. A clear delegation of powers may have to be given in matters not covered by legislation such as anti-poverty programmes, preparation of local plans, construction of roads, etc. The panchayats must be given specific powers to pool resources and undertake integrated local development. There should be no requirement to get any approval from higher levels of bureaucracy in the department of Panchayat Raj or in any other government department.

**\*Monitoring Through Audit:**

Monitoring should be only through annual performance reports and through audits. Individual decisions of panchayats should not also be subject to review or revision by the bureaucracy or by the Ministers at the state level. For the effective discharge of functions, panchayats should have control over the staff working for them.. The panchayats can be empowered to hire their own staff over a period of time. Until then the staff deputed to them should work under the direct control of the Panchayat concerned.

**Powers and Functions:** In its assessment of Indian decentralization, the Task Force on Devolution of Powers and Functions upon Panchayati Raj Institutions (MORD - 2001) found that 'most of the states' had satisfied only the basic requirements relating to the transfer of functions, functionaries, funds and financial autonomy to the Panchayats.

- States reserve the right to assign or withdraw functions to and from the Panchayats by 'executive fiat';
- Panchayats lack autonomous budgeting powers.
- With the exception of Kerala and West Bengal, Panchayats lack discretionary powers over spending and staff;
- There is insufficient clarity and differentiation of functions among Panchayats and other levels of government;
- Village Panchayats have been delegated functions "without adequate administrative, financial and technical support";
- Panchayats at all levels have inadequate powers of taxation;

Reviewing experience from International and Indian settings, four general propositions about the conditions under which decentralization can lead to improved accountability for poor and marginal groups in society can be developed. These are:

1. Active participation among broad elements of society, involving activities like voting, campaigning, attending meetings, running for office, lobbying representatives, etc.
2. Fiscal and political support from higher level authorities within government;
3. The existence of competitive political parties whose legitimacy depends at least in part on the support of the poor.
4. Deeper economic transformation which embolden traditionally subordinate groups to challenge local authority structures.

**Conclusion:** It is imperative to review Panchayat bodies in the era of globalization and liberalization. The People's participation consent depends on some factors, that in the above analysis we have understood the meaning and the process of people's participation. Here, an attempt is made to reveal the factors affecting people's participation in a democratic country like India. The following factors are inhibiting people's participation in the development processes. The coercive power of the propertied class whose aim is not to relieve poverty; rather than the country to make sure that the incomes of the masses are kept low and social services restricted to them. The complex relationship between the economic dependency of poor on rich and the heterogeneity of the poorer sections of Indian society. The inbuilt bias of the local law and order machinery to maintain the status quo. People of AP are victims of huge corruption in revenue department since post independence. To overcome this continued robbery by revenue officials the new Sachivalayam system introduced and slowly dilute the revenue department itself. People sitting in cities never understand vows and tears of village people and their problems and atrocities by revenue officials along with Panchayat staff and electrical department staff. Now after introducing Gram /Ward Sachivalayam System to village/ward people getting several services at their door step without much corruption like cadre certificate, ration card, electrical connection, Arogyasri, Raithu Barosa, crop insurance, seeds and fertilisers, Persons With Disabled Sadaran slats bookings for getting Medical Certificate and several govt schemes including public health centres and many with much easy. I am witness for all these since last four years as I am a Teacher. But this system there no link with any existing systems directly with PR and as its employees service rules and regulations, their cadre and salary fixation on par with other PR employees. It would be discussed and solved by the Govt for eradication of confusion in terms of employees as well as their services rendered to the grass root level people. The lack of supportive legislation and also non-implementation of the existing social legislation enacted in favour of the poor. Local initiatives and developmental efforts can indeed enhance competitiveness and income generation among the village community and create permanent assets to Village. Thus rural-urban divide can be minimized using PRIs as an effective catalyst for making villages assertive, self reliant and competitive. Thus revival of PRIs should not undergo another eclipse on the earlier pattern. There has to be genuine commitment and give new local Leadership to Village, in Panchayat Raj and promote political values and ideologies.

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