

## An Overview of Panchayati Raj and 73<sup>rd</sup> Amendment

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**Abstract:** The present century has brought some fundamental changes in the system of governance throughout the globe and its influence has come heavily on India too. In the conceptual context, such a change is the idealization of 'good governance'. Women are the new actors in the system of good governance especially in rural area, who play their role through the grassroots institution like panchayat raj. The women are now being elected to local council in an unprecedented numbers as a result of the 73rd Constitutional Amendment which mandate the reservation of seats and many other advantages for women in local government. Since the year 1994, the country has experienced several rounds of panchayat elections and thus it is necessary to assess the impact of women's entry into the formal structure of government from the point of view of good governance.

[Ashok Yadav and Madhu. **An Overview of Panchayati Raj and 73<sup>rd</sup> Amendment.** *Researcher* 2015;7(8):62-64]. (ISSN: 1553-9865). <http://www.sciencepub.net/researcher>. 10

**Keywords:** Panchayati Raj, Haryana and 73<sup>rd</sup> Amendment

### 1.1. Introduction:

The Panchayati raj is South Asian political system mainly in India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Nepal (Mullick and Raj, 2007). It is the oldest system of local government in the Indian subcontinent. Panchayati raj is a system of governance in which are the basic unit of administration. The leader of the panchayat was generally called the mukhiya or sarpanch, an elected position. The system of Raj of Panchayat has always existed in India. The Traditional Panchayats had been formed in various parts of India after the pastoral society was converted into an agrarian one following the emergence of agriculture as the major mode of production and the consequent settlement of the villages. Every village community formed a council for the system maintenance and conflict resolution. The British too admired the village 'Panchayat'. Sir Charles Metcalfe, a British governor in India in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century even called them "the little republics". But these so called little republics were not ideal centers with democratic participation of all the people, due to the caste ridden feudal system of those days. During the British period, the working village assemblies were kept alive and wherever there was a demand for them they were revived, in fact, local self government in India, in the sense of a representative institution accountable to the electorate, was the creation of lord Ripon in 1882. It provided for local board consisting of large majority of elected non-official members and presided over by a non-official chairman. By 1925, eight provided in British India had passed acts for the establishment of village Panchayat Avts. However, those panchayats covered only a limited number of villages and had, generally,

a limited number of function (Singh and Chaudhary, 2013).

### 1.2. Recommendations of Balwant Rai Mehta Committee:

The Balwant Rai Mehta Committee, headed by MP Balwantraji Mehta, was a committee appointed by the Government of India in January 1957 to examine the working of the Community Development Programme (1952) and the National Extension Service (1953) and to suggest measures for their better working. The recommendations of the committee were approved by NDC in January 1958 and this set the stage for the launching of Panchayati Raj Institutions throughout the country. The committee recommended the establishment of the scheme of 'democratic decentralisation' which finally came to be known as Panchayati Raj (Mitra, 2001).

(i) Establishment of a 3-tier Panchayati Raj system - Gram Panchayat at the village level, Panchayat Samiti at the block level, and Zila Parishad at the district level.

The panchayat raj system was first adopted by the state of Rajasthan in Nagor district on 2nd Oct 1958. The second state was Andhra Pradesh, while Maharashtra was the Ninth state. This system was adopted by state governments during the 1950s and 60s, as laws were passed to establish panchayats in various states. It also found backing in the Indian Constitution, with the 73rd amendment in 1992 to accommodate the idea. The Amendment Act of 1992 contains provision for devolution of powers and responsibilities to the Panchayats, both for the preparation of economic development plans and social justice, as well as for implementation in

relation to 29 subjects listed in the eleventh schedule of the constitution.

The panchayats receive funds from three sources:

1. Local body grants, as recommended by the Central Finance Commission
2. Funds for implementation of centrally sponsored schemes
3. Funds released by the state governments on the recommendations of the State Finance Commissions

In the history of Panchayati Raj, in India, on 24 April 1993, the Constitutional (73rd Amendment) Act 1992 came into force to provide constitutional status to the Panchayati Raj institutions. This act was extended to Panchayats in the tribal areas of eight states, namely Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat, Himachal Pradesh, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Odisha and Rajasthan starting 24 December 1996. Currently, the Panchayati Raj system exists in all the states except Nagaland, Meghalaya and Mizoram, and in all Union Territories except Delhi. The Balwant Rai Mehta Committee was a committee appointed by the Government of India in January 1957 to examine the working of the Community Development Programme (1952). The Act aims to provide a 3-tier system of Panchayati Raj for all States having a population of over 2 million, to hold Panchayat elections regularly every 5 years, to provide seats reservations for scheduled castes, scheduled tribes and women; to appoint a State Finance Commission to make recommendations regarding the financial powers of the Panchayats and to constitute a District Planning Committee, to prepare a development plan draft for the district. The 3-tier system of Panchayati Raj consists of:

1. Village-level Panchayats
2. Block-level Panchayats
3. District-level Panchayats.

Powers and responsibilities are delegated to panchayats at the appropriate level:

- Preparation of the economic development plan and social justice plan.
- Implementation of schemes for economic development and social justice in relation to 29 subjects given in the Eleventh Schedule of the Constitution.
- To levy and collect appropriate taxes, duties, tolls and fees.

**1.3. The 73<sup>rd</sup> Amendment:** 73rd Amendment Act, 1992 The Constitution (73rd Amendment) Act, 1992 mandates provisions for: -

1. Establishment of a three-tier structure (Village Panchayat, Panchayat Samiti or intermediate level Panchayat and Zilla Parishad or district level Panchayat).

2. To provide 3-tier system of Panchayati Raj for all States having population of over 20 lakh.

3. Establishment of Gram Sabhas at the village level.

4. Regular elections to Panchayats every 5 years.

5. Proportionate seat reservation for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes.

6. Reservation of not less than 33% seats for women.

7. Constitution of State Finance Commissions to make recommendations regarding the financial powers of the Panchayats.

8. Constitution of District Planning Committee to prepare draft development plan for the district as a whole.

**1.4. Powers and Responsibilities:** The Constitution (73rd Amendment) Act, 1992 vests power in the State Government to endow Panchayats with such powers and authority as may be necessary to enable them to function as institutions of self-government such as:

1. Preparation of plans and their execution for economic development and social justice in relation to 29 subjects listed in the XI Schedule of the Constitution.

2. Authority to Panchayat to levy, collect and appropriate taxes, duties, tolls and fees.

3. Transfer of taxes, duties, tolls and fees collected by the States to Panchayats.

**1.5. Gram Sabha:** In the Panchayati Raj set up, the Gram Sabha, the general assembly of villagers, has a key role for effective functioning of Panchayats. In the Gram Sabha meeting, the rural poor, the women and the marginalised people would now get an opportunity to join in decision making on matters affecting their lives. Active functioning of the Gram Sabha would ensure a participatory democracy with transparency, accountability and achievement.

1. Gram Sabha should meet at least in each quarter preferably on Republic Day, Labour Day, Independence Day and Gandhi Jayanti.

2. Decide developmental work to be undertaken by Panchayats based on needs assessment.

3. Suggest remedial measures for economy and efficiency in the functioning of the Panchayats.

4. Question and scrutinise the decisions of Panchayats in the meeting of Gram Sabha.

5. Discuss the Annual Financial Statement of Gram Panchayats.

**1.6. Challenges of Panchayati Raj:** Major challenges of Panchayati Raj in India are as under:

1. Social Challenges
2. Lack of literacy in the public especially in women

3. Lack of political consciousness
4. Passiveness of public in political activities.
5. Undemocratic social structure in India
6. Caste and religious discrimination.
7. Economic Challenges

**1.7. Suggestions:** Major suggestions for making Panchayati Raj successful are as under:

1. There should be change in present social structure
2. N.G.Os should initiate to eliminate social evils as untouchability, castism, communalism, child marriage dowry system and veil system etc.
3. Panchayati Raj Institutes should emphasize improvement in Health, education and roads.
4. Transparent Audit Agency should be established to eliminate corruption and red tapism.
5. Panchayat members should be trained by state govt. especially women.

**Conclusion:** Panchayati Raj Institutes could not achieve their goals because there is a lot of difference between their saying and doing. Actually, there is no real democracy at grass root level. Voters are influenced by castism, communalism, kinship, and money matters and drinking. These social evils create social conflicts. So, if we want success of PRIs, we

should create a healthy society. A healthy society can make a healthy nation.

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8/23/2015