

Gram swaraj and Panchayat Raj System in India

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Introduction:-

India is a land of villages and its true spirit lives in rural area. So to empower the villages Gram Swarajya is essential. This is the sentence of Mahatma Gandhi. To fulfill the dream of Gandhiji's Gramswaraj Indian Constitution Clause 40 has given right to states to establish the Gram Panchayats. The 73rd constitutional Amendment Act (CAA 73) of 1992 gave institutional status to gram panchayats, which until then had been subject to the executive decision of state governments..

The autonomy of Panchayats declined during British rule. The British ruler have not given priority to panchayats. The rulers were interested in creation of "Controlled Local Bodies" which will help them in their trading interest by collecting taxes for them. The Panchayat was destroyed in 1765 by East India Company. The co. has granted the office of Diwan by the Mughal Emperor after his defeat at Buxar. As Diwan the two decisions were taken by the company. The first was to abolish the village land record office & create company official called Patwari. Patwari is a official record keeper for number of villages. The second was creation of magistrate office by abolishing village police. And the policing functions were carried out by the magistrate through "Darogha". The purpose of these measures was the collection of land revenue by fiat. These two measures completely disempowered the village community & destroyed Panchayats, the small business in the villages were also closed down.

After 1857 British Govt. tried to restore the Panchayats. The powers were given to panchayats for minor offences & to resolve villages. But these powers were not sufficient to restore the lost powers of the village community.

A beginning of local Govt. have been made in 1687, when the first time, a local governing body – a municipal Corporation was set up for the city of Madras. Intention was to levy tax. Thus the local Govt. is slightly less than three centuries old in India. During the period 1938-1949 Local government was in a position of repair & reconstruction.

Gram swaraj and Panchayat Raj System-

Mahatma Gandhi strongly believed in democracy in grassroots. He advised decentralized governance at grassroot levels. The concept of Gandhiji's Gramswaraj- "Every village should be a democracy in place, which they will not depend even on neighbor for major needs. They should be self sufficient. Wholly freedom of India means every village will be republic with powers. So to empower the villages Gram Swarajya is essential. This is the sentence of Mahatma Gandhi. To fulfill the dream of Gandhiji's Gramswaraj Indian Constitution Clause 40 has given right to states to establish the Gram Panchayats. The 73rd constitutional Amendment Act (CAA 73) of 1992 gave institutional status to gram panchayats, which until then had been subject to the executive decision of state

governments..73rd& 74th Amendment became operative since April 1993. Local Govt. becomes the third stratum of Govt. under the Indian Constitution.

The federalism in India extends to the financial matters as well. In a federal system functions are divided across different levels of government. The economic rationale for decentralization is based upon the limited geographic extent of the benefits of public goods and the relatively high costs of decision making if everything is centralized division of responsibilities in respect of taxation and public expenditure between the state and the central governments is provided by the Constitution. It also provides for the Finance Commission, which regulates the devolution of finance from the centre to the state. Planning Commission is another institution, which advises on the distribution of plan fund to the state and the Centre.

In 1957 Balwantrai Mehta committee studies the community development projects. The committee held that community development would only be deep and enduring when the community was involved in the planning, decision making and implementation process. One of the specific recommendation of the committee was establishment of three-tier PRI System. Gram panchayat at the village level, Panchayat samiti at the block level and Zilaparishad at the district level. Rajsthan is the first state who have started PRI in 1959 in Nagor Dist.

The objective of the 73rdCAA was to enable panchayats to function as institutions of local self-government, planning and implementing schemes for economic development and social justice. As per the provisions of the Constitution, the State Legislature has been given the discretion to authorize Panchayats to levy taxes and assign taxes, etc, to enable them to mobilize their own resources for discharging assigned duties and functions but Panchayats cannot become effective institutions of local self-governance unless they have a strong financial base and the revenues are properly managed to optimize the resources.

Eleventh Schedule (Article 243G)

This is the new schedule in 73rd Amendment. The Panchayat raj bodies are empowered to take decision on 29 clearly defined subjects these are related to their day to day lives.

1. Agriculture, including agricultural extension.
2. Land improvement, implementation of land reforms, land consolidation and soil conservation.
3. Minor irrigation, water management and watershed development.
4. Animal husbandry, dairying and poultry.
5. Fisheries.
6. Social forestry and farm forestry.
7. Minor forest produce.
8. Khadi, village & cottage industries.
9. Rural housing.
10. Small- scale industries, including food processing industries.
11. Fuel and fodder

12. Drinking water.
13. Rural electrification, including distribution of electricity.
14. Non – conventional energy sources.
15. Roads, culverts, bridges, ferries, waterways & other means of communications.
16. Poverty alleviation program.
17. Education including primary and secondary schools
18. Technical training and vocational education.
19. Adult and non- formal education
20. Libraries
21. Cultural activities.
22. Health and sanitation, including hospitals, primary health centers and dispensaries.
23. Family welfare.
24. Markets and fairs.
25. Women and child development.
26. Social welfare, including welfare of the handicapped and mentally retarded.
27. Public distribution system.
28. Welfare of the weaker sections, and in particular, of the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes.
29. Maintenance of community assets.

The local bodies should become financially solvent is feature of new legislation. This feature relates to Gandhiji's Gram Swaraj. It is true that decentralized decision making carries little sense without carrying out the local programmes. The amendment provides for the devolution of resources to local bodies and also empowers them to raise some resources of their own, such as to levy taxes, duties, fees etc. The another welcome feature of new legislation was the provision for setting up State Finance Commission to allocate adequate resources to the panchayati raj institutions and to review the financial position of panchayats and make recommendations to the state government. For economic development of a country Central Govt., State Govt. & Local Self Govt. are more important. In Rural Local Government the role of Panchayat Raj Institutions is important.

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