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## **Panchayati Raj in India: An Institutional Failure?**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*As Nobel Prize–winning economist Amartya Sen has pointed out, "Democracy is not only the goal of development; it is the primary means of development."*

*For India to build a broad-based, solid foundation for economic and social progress, it must uproot the vestiges of feudalism and instill democratic values and practices. The people who live in India's 750,000 villages must become the authors of their own lives, and women must be respected and supported as equal partners in the process of development.*

*Panchayati Raj is of the oldest system of governance in India. It has existed in India since Vedic times as there has several references of Panchayats in Vedas. The description of Panchayats was next picked up by Karl Marx and used to describe what he saw as one of the characteristic features of the societies that existed under 'Oriental despotism'.<sup>i</sup>*

*In this project the researcher has discussed the functions of the Panchayats and has looked into the system if the Panchayats are Performing its duty or not and the researcher has in the paper also discussed the evils done by the system of Panchayati Raj. The researcher also states the problem faced by the Panchayats and in the end the researcher has discussed the ways by which these problems can be overcome.*

**KEYWORDS** *Panchayati Raj System, Institution, Democracy, Development, Governance, Performance*

### **INTRODUCTION**

*As Nobel Prize–winning economist Amartya Sen has pointed out, "Democracy is not only the goal of development; it is the primary means of development."*

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## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This project looks to analyze and examine the concept of Panchayati Raj in India and its efficiency thereof. The researcher studies Panchayati Raj in great details, examining its methods, processes and the functions of Panchayat and checks if these functions are being performed. Finally the researcher suggests various ways how to bring various reforms in Panchayati Raj which will be useful to the society in general.

## SCOPE AND LIMITATIONS:

The scope of this project is to study whether Panchayati Raj have been used to their full potential and whether its help to the nation or whether it's a cause of more problems. The limitations of this project are certain aspects on the topic like details regarding the legislations have not been discussed in the paper but the researcher has made his best possible attempt to ensure that most of the available exhaustive material on the topic has been covered and all the details have been covered in the project and further analyzed.

## RESEARCH QUESTIONS:

1. What is the nature and significance of the Panchayati Raj in India?
2. What functions does it serve as an administrative body?
3. How efficient is the Panchayati in performing these functions?
4. What are the evils that arise in the rural society stemming from the non-performance of the Panchayati Raj?
5. What are the constraints faced by the Panchayati Raj in performing its functions efficiently?
6. How can these constraints be overcome to ensure smooth functioning of the Panchayati Raj?

## LITERATURE REVIEW

- A H Somjee, *Voting Behavior in Indian Villages*, Baroda, 1959 and R K Park and I Tinker (eds), *Patterns of Panchayati Raj in India*, Princeton, New Jersey, Princeton University Press, 1959. These books deal with the process of electing members of the panchayati raj. From these books the researcher has investigated the concept of representation in the panchayati raj and the flaws in the system of election.
- Krishna Chakraborty and Swapan Kumar Bhattacharyya, *Leadership, Factions and Panchayati Raj.( A Case Study of West Bengal)*, New Delhi, Rawat Publications, 1993. This book deals with the Problem of caste system in the Panchayati Raj and the researcher has used this book to state the problem of caste being the main force behind the authority.
- M.R. Biju, *Dynamics of New Panchayati Raj System*, New Delhi, Kanishka Publishers, Distributors, 1998. This Book deals with features of Panchayati Raj. This

book has been used by the researcher for citation of the assigned functions to the panchayats.

- Susheela Kaushik, *Women and Panchayati Raj*, New Delhi, Har-Anand Publications, 1993 is a book on the role which women play in the Panchayats. This book has been used to discuss the pathetic state of women in Panchayats.
- Anil Kumar Vaddiraju and Shagun Mehrotra, “Making Panchayats Accountable”, 39(37), *Economic and Political Weekly* 4139, 4139-4141(2004). The article talks about how the panchayat can be made accountable. The difficulties involved in doing so have been taken by the researcher from this article.
- Mahi Pal, “People-Oriented Panchayati Raj Framework”, *Economic and Political Weekly*, 37(31), February 2002, p-700. This article talks about the concept how Panchayati Raj can be made people friendly. The researcher takes the suggestion from this article to state in the paper.
- M.N Srinivas and M N Panin, “The Development of Sociology and Social Anthropology in India”, *Sociological Bulletin*, 22(2), September 1973, p 198 has been used to state J L Nehru.

#### **DEFINING PANCHAYATI RAJ:**

*Mahatma Gandhi*, the Father of the Nation once stated, “*Independence must begin at the bottom ... it follows, therefore, that every village has to be self-sustained and capable of managing its affairs...*”

Even before we gained independence, the great revolutionaries like Gandhi were discussing the issue of self-sustenance of villages and Panchayat Raj was advocated by all of them to be a solution to this problem. The philosophy of Panchayat Raj is deeply steeped in tradition and culture of rural India and is by no means a new concept.

The word Panchayat comes from Devanagiri Dialect and it was –“An Indian political system which groups five villages in a quincunx (four peripheral villages around a central one). Each has appointed tasks and responsibilities, such as cart-making or basket-weaving. The central village, usually the largest of the Panchayat, traditionally handles food storage and meeting-places for officials, as well as their residences. ‘Panchayat’ literally means assembly of five wise and respected elders chosen and accepted by the village community. Traditionally, these assemblies settle disputes between individuals and villages.”<sup>iii</sup>

The Gandhian principle of *gram swaraj* that is the village self-government was recognized at the time of India’s independence, but it was never made a part of the constitution, never institutionalized and never fully put into practice. The constitution of India stated: “The state shall take steps to organize village panchayats and endow them with such powers and authority as may be necessary to enable them to function as unit of self-government.”<sup>iv</sup> But until the submission of the Balwantrai Mehta committee report no specific attempt was made in this direction.<sup>v</sup> **And only in 1993, by adopting the 73<sup>rd</sup> amendment to the constitution**, India took concrete steps to create genuine democracy at the village level and transform the face of rural India.<sup>vi</sup>

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*The 73<sup>rd</sup> amendment establishes Panchayati Raj:* a system of local democracy through local councils known as *panchayats*. It gives responsibility and decision-making power in the hands of rural grass-roots people and also gives them a right to pick their representative every five years. The most important feature of this amendment was that for the first time it recognizes the distribution of power and it empowered the people at grass-root level. And in the researcher's opinion the *most revolutionary aspect* of the amendment was that one-third of all panchayat seats are reserved for women. "Rural women — who for centuries have lived in conditions of malnutrition, illiteracy and powerlessness — were now asked to take leadership roles in addressing these very issues."<sup>vii</sup>

Article 243 G of the 73<sup>rd</sup> and the 74<sup>th</sup> amendment of the constitution deal with question of power authority and responsibilities of Panchayats but the implementation is left to the discretion of the state whereas the other features which are mandatory for the state government included are:<sup>viii</sup>

- Establishment of Gram Sabha at village level in all states and Union Territory.
- Establishment of three-tier system of Panchayat Raj at village, inter-mediate and district level in all the states and Union Territory
- Panchayats at all level should be chosen by direct elections from the respective territory.
- Not less than one-third membership and the office of Chairperson of each tier will be reserved for women.
- Reservation for SCs and STs in membership and the officers of Chairpersons at all levels will be provided based on their population in a Panchayat.
- All tier Panchayats will have a term of five years and if a Panchayat is dissolved earlier then fresh elections will be held within six months and all elections will be handled by the state election commission.
- There will be a state finance commission which will look into allocation of resources to Panchayat bodies, every five years.

As mentioned above Panchayat Raj as a concept has always been in the lime light and has always drawn attention. After the Balwantrai Mehta Committee report time and again it has been in the line of fire and a topic of discussion.

Jawaharlal Nehru including many more revolutionaries supported Panchayat Raj. He once said "...*authority and power must be given to the people in the village...Let us give power to panchayats.*"<sup>ix</sup>

Gandhi was always a strong supporter of Panchayati Raj and he used to write articles regularly in *Harijan* supporting the it. In one of his many writings (*Harijan*, 28-7-1946) he wrote: "Independence must begin at the bottom. Thus, every village will be a republic or Panchayat having full powers. It follows, therefore, that every village has to be self-sustained and capable of managing its affairs even to the extent of defending itself against the whole world. It will be trained and prepared to perish in the attempt to defend itself against any onslaught from without. Thus, ultimately, it is the individual who is the unit." He continued, "This does not exclude dependence on and willing help from neighbours or from the world. It will be free and voluntary play of mutual forces. Such a society is necessarily highly cultured in which every man and woman knows what he or she wants and,

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what is more, knows that no one should want anything that others cannot have with equal labour. This society must naturally be based on truth and non-violence which, in my opinion, are not possible without a living belief in God, meaning a self-existent, All-knowing living Force which inheres every other force known to the world and which depends on none and which will live when all other forces may conceivably perish or cease to act. I am unable to account for my life without belief in this all-embracing living light.”<sup>x</sup>

He also defined the function of panchayat in *Harijan*, 4-1-1948, and stated:<sup>xi</sup>

“It is the function of the Panchayat to revive honesty and industry.... It is the function of the Panchayats to teach the villagers to avoid disputes, if they have to settle them. This will ensure speedy justice without any expenditure. You will need neither the police nor the military... Then the Panchayat should see to cattle improvement. They should show steady increase in the mild yield..... the Panchayat should also see to an increase in the quantity of foodstuff grown in their village. This is to be accomplished by properly maturing the soil. You have your indigenous games. You should banish intoxicating drinks and drugs from your midst. I hope you will eradicate untouchability if there is any trace of it still in your village. The Hindus, the Muslims, the Sikhs, the Parsees and the Christians should all live as brothers and sisters. If you achieve all I have mentioned, you will demonstrate real independence, and people from all over India will come to see your model village and take inspiration from it.”  
The real question is that: Are these functions being performed?

### **PANCHAYATS: GRASS-LEVEL DEMOCRACY OR AN INSTITUTIONAL FAILURE**

Gandhi had a unique idea of Panchayat. In his idea of an ideal panchayat is supposed to teach the villagers to avoid disputes; the researcher thinks this *Utopian Concept* does not exist today. The world in which we live today, we are bound to have differences because of complications of the society in which we live today.

#### **Agriculture**

His writing said that the panchayat's should help in increasing the quantity of foodstuff grown in the village which can be accomplished by properly maturing the soil; rather a nice idea but the important question is that is the Panchayat doing the same? Today an average villager has a very small holding, and implementation of advanced technology on these holdings is very difficult for two reasons; an average villager is too poor use these technologies and even if the panchayats help introducing these technology on the fields, the desired results will not be achieved because of the small size of the farm. Today in almost every village we see that either the landholding is very small or they are too large. The *Zamindari System* which is still prominent in the villages and no Panchayat has the authority to take actions against the *Zamindari System* which is the root cause of inequalities in the villages.

#### **Banishing of Intoxicating Drinks**

Another thing mentioned by Gandhi was banishing the intoxicating drinks and drugs. The banishing of intoxicating drinks and drugs are a very nice thing to do but the question which I want to ask is that which government body will stop the industry which is giving the largest



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amount of tax to it. It's a common know fact that Panchayats in most of the villages survive from the extra money which it collect and alcohol industry is the biggest contributors in these regions so there is no point in arguing that the Panchayats will banish the liquor industry until and unless the state or the central government takes some firm steps and also increase the aid which it gives to the Panchayats.

### **Untouchability**

Eradication of Untouchability is another important point that Gandhi mentioned; Untouchability is beyond doubts the most evil practice which has ever existed in the society. The Indian Constitution has also recognized untouchability as a punishable offence under *Article 17* of the constitution since the formation of the constitution but still the problem of untouchability still prevails in the villages. This is an important problem which should have been solved by now but Panchayati Raj has not been very successful in eradicating it and one of the many reason is said to be the unequal participation of the people of the backward caste in the democracy. The constitution as stated above, reserves seat for SCs and STs in membership and in officers of Chairpersons at all levels but these members are more often than not are over-ruled by the dominating members of the higher caste who have the support of the majority and thus untouchability still prevails.

### **Gram Sabha**

If we take a look on the other issue, focus on Gram Sabha is another problem and a function which is not being performed. "The Gram Sabha is the fulcrum of the entire panchayat raj system as it enables each and every voter of the village to participate in decision-making at local level hence a strong strength to local people."<sup>xii</sup> Although the gram sabha is considered as the heart of the entire scheme of decentralization of power in governance, Article 243-A of the Central Act does not specify the functions and powers of it except to say that "All Gram Sabha may exercise such powers and perform such functions at village level as the legislature of a state may, by law, provide."<sup>xiii</sup> Now what it does is that it give birth to a body which function to endorse, to recommend or suggest and even consider the annual account and audit notes but when it comes to the implementation of the suggestions, the gram panchayat can ignore the suggestion of the gram sabha because the suggestion of the former is not binding on the latter. Thus there is no point having a body such as gram sabha.

### **Elections**

Fair Election is Gram Panchayat is another burning issue. Elections in India have been shrouded in controversies. They have been wrought with notorious activities of anti-social elements. Thus Indian elections have been a prey to the paradox of the instrument of democracy being anti-democratic. Even the Panchayat election is not left untouched with the corruption. A revealing factor in the panchayat elections are liquor and money greater than coercion and intimidation. Of late it has been observed that even the caste factor which has been the bedrock of Indian politics does not have the effect on the elections as much as Liquor and money have. Contestants buy votes of the weaker sections of the society at Rs. 300 to RS. 500. It has been reported that in recent panchayat elections held in Uttar Pradesh, the State Election Commission had fixed the ceilings on election expenses for village president at Rs. 18,000 and for the president at Rs. 30,000, members of Zila Parishad at Rs. 50,000 and for the president at Rs. 1, 00,000. It was reported that the candidate who won the election had spent about Rs. 2 lakh in purchasing votes. In Muzaffarnagar, according to

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report a colour television was being offered for every five votes.<sup>xiv</sup> The reason why so much money is being put into the system is because presidentship at all level and membership at intermediate and apex level are status symbols and by winning these posts, the winner can keep the local power structure under their control and also influence state and national level.<sup>xv</sup>

### **Control of Powers**

Panchayats in villages are still controlled by landlords, usurers and traders who are generally from the upper caste. They deliberately use the caste to their benefit and by securing legitimate powers; they preserve and expand their economic control. Many studies have proved that it is the economically powerful lot or the high class people who control the panchayats.<sup>xvi</sup> And according to a recent study of panchayat leadership in 15 evaluation blocks spread over 14 states revealed that 88.1 percent of the members of the panchayats and 95.7 percent of the panchayat president are landlords, 32.5 percent of members and 89.4 percent of presidents belong to rich families, and 69.8 percent of members and 97.9 percent of presidents come from high castes.<sup>xvii</sup>

### **Emancipation of Women**

When panchayati raj was implemented in 1993, it was considered to be one of the most important step towards the empowerment of women and increasing their participation in decision making by reserving 33% seats for women in panchayat raj institutions.<sup>xviii</sup> This paved the way for election of many women as members and even chairpersons. It was said that Panchayat will be an institutions which will be the grass-roots units of self-government and it would be the vehicle of socio-economic transformation in rural India but the present scenario, it doesn't look like a vehicle of socio-economics transformation but it looks like another institution failure. Effective and meaningful functioning of these bodies would have been possible only by involvement, contribution and participation of both male and female but it never happened. The main purpose for reservation of seats for women was to empower the poor, illiterate women living in the villages so that she can participate in the democracy and so that emancipation of women can take place has not achieved. The reason for the reservation for the seats in the panchayat was that women could be in a position where she could fight for their rights and help in the up-liftment of women. Today in most of the panchayats, the women who are selected and are at some office of Chairperson or even those who are the members are from well to do family, and those who are educated and have a good position in society thus reservation is not serving any purpose.

Even in the cases where poor women was selected as a panchayat member, it is easy to point out numerous examples of women who have work entirely according to what they were told by their husbands or other male members of their families. In some cases elected women remained at home while their husbands attended the panchayat meetings and carried out official transactions on their behalf. Some of the elected women were approached by men only when their signatures (or thumb impressions) were needed.

Women's effective participation in the Panchayati Raj is thus subject to the way in which the Panchayati Raj operates. That is, if the Panchayati Raj system functions in principles, democratic and meaningful way, then and only then can women's participation be enhanced.<sup>xix</sup>

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For this we cannot entirely blame them, “One important aspect that is to be note while discussing this form of rural direct democracy is that for the most part elected representatives come from oppressed sections of the society. They may lack literacy and education and may not understand the significance of the amendments through which they have come to occupy these positions. Dalit, women, dalit women and backward classes women representatives come and occupy positions in rural institutions for the first time (because reservation on rotation basis). They were not aware of their roles, were not given the powers and finances due to them and they did not wield de facto power in the village because of these reasons so how can one expect them to be efficient from the word go.”<sup>xx</sup>

*Jawaharlal Nehru, first Prime Minister of India once said that -*

*“India is poor because the villages of India are poor. India will be rich if the villages of India are rich. Panchayats should be given greater power; for we want the villagers to have a greater measure of real swaraj [self-government] in their own villages.”*

These words of the first Prime Minister of this country are undoubtedly the words of wisdom but the question is that are these words only words or has it materialized and if not will it materialize in the near future?

### **Evils of Panchayati Raj**

The way things are going, it does not look like a pretty picture. While researching for this paper the researcher went through a few articles which made the researcher to think: Is Panchayati Raj a boon to the society or is it a bane?

In the newsmagazine **The Week** of Jan 26<sup>th</sup> 2003, issue titled **SOLD** had stories about panchayats in India, specifically about women being ‘fined, humiliated, and sold to the highest bidder.’<sup>xxi</sup> The researcher has mentioned a few of the stories stated in the issue in this paper:

*“Devaki Bai, 30, had been sold to another man for Rs 5,000 ... Women were auctioned during Panchganga, a panchayat held to hear matters of dispute ... Women were asked to lower their saris and stand with stones on their heads.*

*Young Basanta was sold for Rs 8,000. ... More than 20 women were brought to the Panchganga to settle disputes and to be auctioned. Those with no bidders were slapped with a fine and made to stand for six hours with a huge stone on their heads.*

*Sushila was sold ... for Rs 7,000. Basanta did not want to go back to her husband... Her father was fined Rs 10,000 and then she was put on sale.*

*... her head was uncovered and her sari lowered suggestively by the Panchganga members. ... Basanta said police were present at the auction.*

*Basanta was sold for Rs 8,000 and when she objected she was made to hold up one hand and stand on one leg. She was left to starve while others feasted...*

*“The money collected as fine and sale of women was used for the feast and allied expenses of Panchganga,” said tahsildar Jayant Joshi. ...<sup>xxii</sup>*



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The story doesn't end here. There are several other instances which were cited by the researcher in several other articles which stated below<sup>xxiii</sup>:

- A young woman bludgeoned to death on the orders of a panchayat because the village concocted stories about her having an affair and giving birth to an illegitimate child.
- Two teenagers dragged into a shack, hacked to death and burnt by their families with the enthusiastic approval of the panchayat because the boy was a Brahmin and his inamorata belonged to a lower caste.
- A married woman, accused of sexual misconduct, is given the choice by the village council of being fined, or raped by five men. The woman, a teacher, told a television news channel that schoolchildren had been forced to say that she was guilty of illicit sexual relations.
- A couple stoned to death for wanting to marry. They belonged to different castes but their families had no objection. The village council disagreed. The families were also driven out for being so 'liberal'.
- A young girl denounced for "immorality" and accused of being pregnant is told to leave her home along with her family. The large belly turns out to be a tumour, but the village council refuses to allow her or her family back.
- Panchayat raj was supposed to be the bedrock upon which India's democracy was to be grounded according to Gandhi. Rural India is stupefyingly superstitious, ignorant, uneducated, poor and petty-minded, misogynistic, and myopic and it makes the idealistic dream of Gandhi look like the biggest evil on this planet.

It was observed by the researcher that almost every other day stories emerge from the interior of the India about panchayats, handing out gruesome judgments on anyone whose behaviour was so called conventions. Many panchayat members are very conventional and they do not want to see changes even if it is in the form of development.

In one of the cases which the researcher observed - A low-caste woman in south India who moved to a town, got education and then became a social worker, returned to her village one day to see her folks. The high-caste members of the panchayat, incensed that she was wearing shoes, threw chilli powder in her eyes, thrashed her for impertinence with — a nice touch — her own shoes, and threw her out.

The strangest problems with panchayats are their willingness to accept Indian laws. Each panchayat have their own law. Recently a court in Rajasthan, ruled recently that an illegitimate child should enjoy the same inheritance rights as the child born in wedlock. Within a month a case was registered in Rajasthan that a woman was dragged naked through the streets with bells tied around her neck and her face blackened with shoe polish because she was found to have an illegitimate child and both the women and the child were thrown out of the village.

In another case, India's Supreme Court decreed that any Hindu well-versed in the scriptures could become a priest in a temple, not just Brahmins. Try getting high-caste villagers to follow the ruling when they won't even let the low castes set foot inside a temple or go near the village pond for fear of 'contamination'.<sup>xxiv</sup>

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## **REASONS OF FAILURE**

We have discussed enough that about the Panchayats not serving the purpose, but we haven't spoken about the problem that Panchayats face and its time we did that.

### **Financial Constraints**

Among all the problems Panchayats face, Financial Constraints are the biggest issue which has to be solved. Most of the plans of Panchayats are not implemented because of the financial constraints. Recently the Union Panchayati Raj Ministry has prepared a software to maintain databases of bank accounts of all Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) to facilitate the transfer of funds through banking channels, preferably electronically. Once the data is entered, money can be transferred directly to the 2, 40,000 PRIs from the State's Consolidate Fund.<sup>xxv</sup>

This may help alleviate the problem of low finances which in turn will enable the panchayats to provide the basic infrastructure in terms of roads and educational facilities as well. The panchayat can ensure rural development only if it is able to provide these overheads.

Also, the financial incentives may also be used to ensure transparency and efficient governance. They may be used to run workshops educating the panchayat members regarding a more professional approach towards governance.

If this infrastructure is not provided, it will aggravate several social and political problems that already plague the villages of India.

Thus providing steady financial support should be the central government's primary concern if it wishes to improve the efficiency of the panchayats.

### **Ensuring Law and Order**

The primary function of any governing body is to ensure law and order. The panchayats have clearly failed in doing so considering the rate of crimes and social problems. Since most of these crimes are of a social nature they must be tackled by addressing social problems.

The number of social evils still persisting in the rural society area is a measure of the lack of law and order. These social evils must be eradicated. Only then can the panchayats ensure a good life to the citizens of the village.

The crime rates may also be a sign of restlessness and feeling of dissatisfaction among the people. This may be a result of the lack of economic activity or opportunity or also a denial of basic human rights to the citizens.

The economic activity will improve with an improvement in infrastructure. With an increase in social and economic overheads the investment in these areas will increase.

The denial of basic human rights is a problem that can only be solved by the administrative body, that is, the panchayat. A strict imposition of law and order will help ensure the basic rights to the citizens of the individuals.

### **Social Constraints**

It has already been mentioned that the panchayat is unable to tackle several of the problems related to the social well being of the village community. Problems such as crimes based on

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caste, untouchability, discrimination, prostitution etc are not only overlooked by the panchayat but also often endorsed by them.

Such problems arise out of ignorance and social stagnation. The original idea of a panchayat was the five wisest men of the village regulating the village affairs. This basic premise has lost its prominence. The panchayat has essentially become a power house of the most dominant men of the village, a monopoly of the high caste, who use their authority for the benefit of their families and their castes.<sup>xxvi</sup>

The election procedures of the panchayats are flawed in their implementation. Therefore in spite of the reservations and the legislations made to ensure equal and fair representation, the weaker sections are grossly under represented. This results in cases of exploitation.

Because of the unequal status in the representation of the members of society in the panchayats, the caste distinction is magnified. As long as the castes will be suppressed, there can be no question of social equality. Take for instance a man who is of a lower caste. By the very fact that his representative is not present in the members of the panchayat his problems will not be heard. Nor will the leading administrative and justice dispensing body will be able to identify with his problems. The principle of equality before law and equal protection of law<sup>xxvii</sup> is violated.

The only solution to this problem is to ensure equal representation in the panchayats. The elections of the panchayat may even be monitored by the State government to ensure transparency.

Another solution may be to educate the members of the panchayat against the social evils. The more backward classes may need to be educated regarding their rights.

Until the social issues of the rural areas are resolved the panchayats will not be able to bring about any semblance of progress in the villages. The same customs will prevail and prove to be the bane to society as they have been for over centuries.

### **Political Constraints**

The main political constraints lie in the informal way of administration. The members of the panchayat do not represent the people. They merely run the panchayat as one would run his household. Their programmes and policies don't address the problems of the society. Rather they seek immediate satisfaction of their own personal requirements.

If any administrative system is to run efficiently it must be run with a certain level of professionalism. The panchayats lack this professional and formal air. If the panchayat was a strictly administrative organization with fixed programmes and policies and checks on efficiency the half the problems mentioned in this chapter would not arise.

The panchayats should take a leaf out of the book of the urban local bodies which are run much more efficiently simply because of the strict rules of procedure. The panchayats must be made accountable for their decisions and be held liable for their mistakes.

A professional administrator may be appointed to ensure smooth functioning of the political machinery. If a number of IAS officers are appointed to supervise the functioning of village panchayats then their constructive criticism could help run the rural administration more efficiently. Also these officers will be devoid of the caste bias of that area which will also

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help lessen the oppression of the lower castes. Another purpose that will be served by the appointment of these officers will be ensuring optimum allocation of government funds to ensure maximum returns.

However, the proposed plan may not be practically possible on several counts. First, there may arise a shortage of IAS officers that cannot be met by the government at such short notice. Secondly, the IAS officers may not perceive this post to be stepping stone to a substantial rise in their career. This will lead to complacency and inefficiency on their parts.

Thirdly, the IAS officers will not be aware of the finer nuances of the social framework of the village. This may lead to blunders in policy making. Fourth and the most crucial, the villagers themselves may be hostile towards these representatives of the Central or State government. For this suggestion to work it is mandatory that the Panchayat members and the Government representative work together.

An alternative option would be to train the administrative heads of the panchayat. Workshops on political science and good governance may be conducted. A framework of policies and governance may be provided to them to guide their decision making. The members may be taken on occasional seminars and visits to the urban local bodies.

Both the suggestions will require some extras inputs, the first in terms of man power and skill, the second in terms of financial support. It is up to the government to decide which of the two will be more cost effective. But there is no doubt that the haphazard method of governance in the panchayats must be improved to increase efficiency.

Thus the problems of panchayat are very grave in nature. Yet they are not without solutions. The state and the central government have only to sincerely concentrate on resolving these issues before the Panchayati Raj becomes as efficient as it was anticipated to be.

The Panchayati Raj is the heart of the village. To resolve the problems of the rural areas these organizations must first be liberated from the shackles of age old tradition and the social constraints they impose. That alone will lead to the rise of the villages of India.

## **CONCLUSION**

The concept of Panchayati Raj is undoubtedly the stepping stone to the rural development. However this system is not being used to its optimum value due to the several problems plaguing the Panchayati Raj system.

The constitution of India was drafted keeping in mind the bulk of the Indian population that lived in villages. The authors of the constitution aimed at ensuring their well-being and prosperity. Owing to this conscious decision, as well as, the amendments that followed, the Panchayati Raj system, on paper, is nearly flawless. The problems arise in implementation.

The Panchayati Raj is unable to perform the basic function attributed to it. Thus, it is a redundant tool in the hands of the central and state government. Now it is only up to the central and state governments to make policy decision so as to ensure efficient functioning of the Panchayat.

The social evils and the illiteracy must be eradicated to provide a liberated society free from impediments. In this society alone, can fertile minds bear the fruits of progress. Without such

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an atmosphere of emancipation, the development of the rural areas will remain a faraway dream.

With 70 % of the Indian population residing in the villages, the nation's progress greatly depends on the development of these areas. The onus of rural development lies squarely on the shoulders of the Panchayati Raj. In the event that it fails to fulfill this basic function, the Panchayati Raj can easily be dubbed as an "Institutional Failure". It is up to India as government, a democracy and most of all as a nation to prevent such a shameful occurrence.

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