



Decision making process at the grassroots level

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Abstract

Panchayat raj, as a system of governance at the grassroots level in rural India has been rightly conceived as the most viable and proper mechanism of realising the goals of democracy, development, peace and security. Panchayat Raj is a system of maximum welfare of maximum people and based on justice. After Independence efforts have been made to create the units of self-governance at grassroots level but all went in vain since they could not produce the desired result. After Independence efforts were continued to create the panchayats as units of self-governance but the committed Central Government's initiative came out with 73rd Amendment for the establishment of panchayat raj institutions in India in 1993.

Keywords: decentralization, panchayat raj, 73rd amendment

Introduction

India is the land of diversities. Here dwell the people of various religion, races and traditions. These diversities often vent out as a demand of states in different area of the country. In one side there are a higher income group living a luxurious life and on the other hand there are also a group of people who scarcely earn the income to survive. Almost 70 per cent of the total population is living in the villages but there is still a very poor state of development in the villages. There is no sign of development, no proper facility of education, health, electricity and roads. To make the democracy meaningful and welfare oriented we need the affective decentralisation of democracy through the panchayati raj institution. Democracy is the fundamentally decentralised system of governance. We have several problems of education, poverty, lower income and unemployment.

The concept of governance is not new and is as old as human civilisation. Governance means the processed of decision making and the process by which decisions are implemented or not implement. Governance is the process of decision-making and the process by which decisions are implemented. An analysis of governance focuses on the formal and informal actors involved in decision-making and implementing the decisions made and the formal and informal structures that have been set in place to arrive at and implement the decision. In India after independence efforts have been made to meet the needs and expectations of the people. Special efforts have been taken up to address the rural multifaceted issues with massive investment but the results were not up to the expectations. The idea that produced the 73rd Amendment Act was not a response to pressure from the grassroots but to an increasing recognition that the institutional initiatives of the preceding decades had not delivered expected result, as the extent of rural poverty was still much too large and thus the existing structure of government needed to be reformed. It was a political drive to see panchayat raj institutions as a solution to the governmental crises that India was

experiencing.

To make the democracy meaningful and welfare oriented there is a need of decentralisation. The democracy is fundamentally decentralised system of governance. Indian democracy has adopted a unitary system. Central government at the federal level, state government at the provincial level and local government at the grassroots level. For the establishment of true democracy there is a need of local governance bodies. Fruits of democracy may reach to the public only by the local governance. Local self-government created by an Act of the Central or State Government is a government entity, including the district, town or village consists of representatives elected by the people of an area and for those who exercise their rights to human welfare (Dey, 1961: 91).

In the democratic system, panchayat is the only institute that takes the governance to the door of common people. The conception of democracy finds more realistic expression by the means of panchayat raj institutions. In this form of governance, villagers take part to decide their own future collectively. Since the problems are concerned with their villages, people take interest in solving them with the help of panchayat (Kothari, 1961: 757) ^[14]. Local governance has been outlined as the form of psychological and practical needs of the local people. By nature human has always a will to be governed by his own hands because he can serve himself better. Human is self-centered by the nature. This sense of governance has been seen from the ancient time (Mutalib and Khan, 1983: 259). Local governance as the sense of thoughtfulness, justifiable and sociability (Bryce, 1921: 149-50) ^[7].

Panchayat raj, as a system of governance at the grassroots level in rural India has been rightly conceived as the most viable and proper mechanism of realising the goals of democracy, development, peace and security. Panchayat Raj is a system of maximum welfare of maximum people and based on justice. After Independence efforts have been made to

create the units of self-governance at grassroots level but all went in vain since they could not produce the desired result. After Independence efforts were continued to create the panchayats as units of self-governance but the committed Central Government's initiative came out with 73rd Amendment for the establishment of panchayat raj institutions in India.

The 73rd Amendment to the Constitution of India not only gave a constitutional status to the panchayats; it also provided uniformity and formal structure to these traditional institutions of self-governance for the sake of their effective functioning. The earlier attempts at institutionalising the panchayats were half-hearted and failed due to the absence of supportive constitutional measures and lack of political will. The 73rd Amendment initiated a fundamental restructuring of governance and administrative system of the country, based on the philosophy of decentralisation and power to the people. The new panchayat raj institutions have the potential to usher in a new era of change and development in accordance with people's needs and priorities, and to revitalise a deeply troubled system of democracy (Behar & Kumar: 2002)^[4].

Madhya Pradesh was the pioneer state, which implemented the 73rd Amendment by enacting panchayat law, and conducted panchayat elections in 1994. The panchayat raj system in Madhya Pradesh has constantly evolved during the past decade and half, supported by a strong political will. There were several amendments to the Act and government orders were issued from time to time, which supported and strengthened the decentralisation process. The panchayat raj system in Madhya Pradesh has a dynamic growth, which has constantly responded to the needs emerging from the field. Through panchayat raj, an attempt is being made to initiate a new era of people's empowerment. Importantly, the Madhya Pradesh government perceived decentralisation and people's participation as central to its governance agenda, of which the panchayat system is living example of democracy at the grassroots level (Sisodia: 2007)^[28].

From the point of view of democratic governance, there are two basic propositions. First that the society with its structural rigidities would get a legal and institutional space through panchayat raj in order to operate in an accountable as well as meaningful manner. This means, the introduction of panchayat raj should be able to homogenise the difference existing in the society owing to its stratification on caste, class and gender lines. This homogenisation will result in an informed decision making at the grassroots level. Secondly, the policymakers, at the macro level, have faith in the new system's capability to deliver, and the development process, thus will be more responsible as well as dependable than any of the earlier tested systems of governance. Even if these hitherto untested propositions are true, the fluidity in acceptance of a macro decision to reform the governance will depend on how the micro functionaries at the grassroots are interpreting and adopting the macro process. It is quite likely that traditional power centres still have overbearing influence on the new system of governance for it to operate democratically. More anxious, however, will be situations where decisions in the newly created institutions succumb to pressures of traditional power centres.

The Madhya Pradesh Panchayat Raj Act, 1993 was enacted to

create and amend existing laws for the establishment of panchayat raj institutions. This Act was drafted in conformity with the objectives, substance and directives of the 73rd Constitutional Amendment. The Act was given Governor's assent on 24th January, 1994.

Several challenges to the panchayat raj system have emerged during the last one decade and half of its operationalisation in Madhya Pradesh. Fortunately, a proactive State government has responded to these needs and challenges. The government analysed the strain on the system and identified the problem areas, and made a serious attempt to address these problem areas at all levels. The causative factors were identified in the underlying panchayat laws and the panchayat raj system as enunciated in the Madhya Pradesh Panchayat Raj Act, 1993. The State government, in earnest to resolve these constraints, changed and reissued its office orders and also amended the Panchayat Act itself. This willingness and flexibility of the State government to tackle bottlenecks has given strength to the panchayat raj system in Madhya Pradesh. It also reflects the political will to ensure the success of panchayat raj system in the state. The Amendments have given much-needed elasticity to the system and have contributed to the success of the panchayat raj system in Madhya Pradesh as institutions of grassroots democracy. A dynamic system where information flows upward from the bottom and a system that responds and adjusts to these stimuli is a truly democratic and representative system. The State government has made more than 10 amendments to the Madhya Pradesh Panchayat Act, 1993. Drawing on experience gathered in the functioning of the panchayat raj institutions, the State government has amended the Panchayat Act to genuinely strengthen and empower the panchayat raj system.

An analysis of the Amendments clearly reflects the government's desire to institutionalise and empower the system. The Amendments deal with the teething problems of the system. Via the Amendments, the State government has tried to overcome limitations that had cropped up during implementation of the Act.

The aim, in addition to strengthening the panchayat, is also to articulate and define the functional space of these institutions. A constant endeavour was to define the function of these institutions and devolve more administrative and financial powers to the panchayats. Simultaneously, the Amendments try to guarantee socio-economic change in favour of the marginalised, as envisaged in the 73rd Constitutional Amendment. The State government, through the Amendments, has tried to operationalise the panchayats, consistent with the ideology of 'power to people' and democratic decentralisation.

The study design

The study conducted in the Dewas district of Madhya Pradesh. The study is mainly dealing with the primary data. The study as an evaluative study on fact based, descriptive and analytical. A proportionate sampling framework adopted. Dewas district which includes eight tehsils. Out of eight tehsils three tehsils were selected randomly for the purpose of this study. From the selected tehsils, 5 Gram Panchayats were chosen in-depth study. Thus from 3 tehsils 15 Gram Panchayats were chosen in-depth study. The selection of

Gram Panchayat was based on random from the list of all the gram panchayats of the selected block.

Panchayat Representatives and Gram Sabha Member /Villagers were the units of observation. From each selected Gram Panchayat – 5 Panchayat Representatives (1-Sarpanch, 1- Up-Sarpanch and 3- Panch) and 10 Gram Sabha Members (5 Male and 5 Female) were to taken for an in-depth interview. Thus, in all, from 15 Gram Panchayats of 3 tehsils, the size of sample was 75 Panchayat Representatives (15-Sarpanch, 15- Up-sarpanch and 45- Panch) and 150 Gram Sabha Members (75 Male and 75 Female). Thus, the total size of sample was 225.

For the study, both primary and secondary data were collected. Secondary data was based on books, journals, monographs, occasional papers, governments publications, circular, orders, ordinances etc. For primary data, two separate interview schedules were structured and administered among the respondents (gram sabha members and panchayat representatives). The interview schedules broadly included on issues of awareness and exposure of the respondents towards the indicators of governance. The eight indicators of

governance viz., participation, rule of law, transparency, responsiveness, consensus orientedness, equity and inclusiveness, effectiveness and efficiency and accountability among the stakeholders and local political leadership were studied through primary survey. For the data collection included both the providers and the recipients, therefore the emerging trends were crosschecked with respect to facts, point of view, perception and attitudes towards governance with human development. For this purpose, the qualitative methods include-key informant interviews, in depth interviews, participant observation and case study analysis. The participatory assessment methods included mainly directional group discussion. Dairy maintained to record the observation throughout the field work. Besides these, a village schedule and a directional group discussion were also administered to know the profile of the villages and other similar issues. On the basis of collected data code books were prepared; all the interview schedules were coded accordingly. Coded schedules were entered in the computer using SPSS (version 10) software. Mainly frequency tables and cross tables were generated for analysis and interpretation of data.

1. Analysis and Interpretation of Panchayat Representatives

Table 1.1: Decision Making Process in Gram Gabha.

S. No.	Decision making process in gram sabha	General (%)	OBC (%)	SC (%)	ST (%)	Total* (%)
1	By majority	7 (38.9)	7 (19.4)	11 (55.0)	0 (0.0)	25 (33.3)
2.	Unanimously	9 (50.0)	15 (41.7)	11 (55.0)	0 (0.0)	35 (46.7)
3	By sarpanch	11 (61.1)	22 (61.1)	9 (45.0)	1 (100.0)	43 (57.3)
4	By village head/patel	2 (11.1)	12 (33.3)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	14 (18.7)
5	By secretary/government officials	5 (27.8)	12 (33.3)	8 (40.0)	1 (100.0)	26 (34.7)

*Multiple Responses

Source: Primary Data

Table 1.1 provides the details of decision making process in gram sabha. 57.3 per cent respondents are of the view that the decisions are taken by sarpanch. 46.7 per cent respondents express the view that the decision are taken unanimously. 34.7 per cent respondents say that secretary/government officials take the decision. 33.3 per cent respondents point out that the

decisions are taken by majority and 18.7 per cent respondents feel that the decisions are taken by village head/patel. The above analysis clearly depicts that the prominently prevalent process of decision making is by sarpanch which denotes a very specifically that the hold of sarpanch which is not in tune with the spirit of panchayat raj.

2. Analysis and Interpretation of Gram Sabha Members

Table 2.1: Decision Making Process in Gram Sabha.

S. No.	Decision making Process in gram sabha	General (%)	OBC (%)	SC (%)	ST (%)	Total* (%)
1	By majority	16 (39.0)	23 (27.7)	7 (30.4)	0 (0.0)	46 (30.9)
2	Unanimously	16 (39.0)	22 (26.5)	7 (30.4)	0 (0.0)	45 (30.2)
3	By sarpanch	31 (75.6)	70 (84.3)	16 (69.6)	1 (50.0)	118 (79.2)
4	By village head/patel	13 (31.7)	26 (31.3)	9 (39.1)	0 (0.0)	48 (32.2)
5	By secretary/government officials	13 (31.7)	35 (42.2)	8 (34.8)	1 (50.0)	57 (38.3)
6	Do not know	6 (14.6)	8 (9.6)	5 (21.7)	0 (0.0)	19 (12.8)

*Multiple Responses

Source: Primary Data

Table 2.1 provides the details of decision making process in gram sabha. 79.2 per cent respondents are of the view that the decisions are taken by sarpanch. 38.3 per cent respondents say that secretary/government officials take the decision. 32.2 per cent respondents feel that the decisions are taken by village head/patel. 30.9 per cent respondents point out that the

decisions are taken by majority. 30.2 per cent respondents express the view that the decision are taken unanimously. The above analysis clearly depicts that the prominently prevalent process is decision making by sarpanch which denotes a very specifically that the hold of sarpanch is extraordinary and not in tune with the spirit of panchayat raj.

Conclusion

It has been evident from the working experience of panchayat raj institutions and also as the above mentioned responses of respondents indicate that the level of participation of people at grassroots level has been relatively low. Despite knowing the procedural aspect, gram sabhas are almost a formal institution. There is a clear cut gap between macro level decisions and grassroots reality.

The grassroots experiences suggest that the majority of the panchayat representatives and villagers are aware about the procedural aspects of gram sabha meetings. Keeping in view the indicators of governance, the understanding towards different aspects of panchayat raj is of mixed nature. In majority cases where present panchayat raj representatives endorsed the adherence to many procedural dimensions whereas the gram sabha members on the country gave their note of dissent on many issues and very specifically and categorically brought out the hegemonic position of sarpanch and secretary. This scenario has revealed an adverse kind of grassroots reality which has hampered the process of governance in term of participation, inclusiveness, transparency, accountability etc.

It seems that only amendment in the State Act from time to time and specific provision for the system will not change the scenario. There is an urgent need to opt for an effective device whereby maximum people can be informed, made aware and motivated to come forward for the proper implementation and execution of panchayat raj. There is an urgent need to break the culture of silence and to strive for capacity building; sensitisation and orientation toward improve the grassroots scenario.

The above analysis clearly depicts that the prominently prevalent process of decision making is by sarpanch which denotes a very specifically that the hold of sarpanch which is not in tune with the spirit of panchayat raj. The analysis clearly depicts that the prominently prevalent process is decision making by sarpanch which denotes a very specifically that the hold of sarpanch is extraordinary and not in tune with the spirit of panchayat raj.

Suggestions

- The provisions of the State Acts should be translated into simple Hindi and local dialect and be distributed to all panchayat functionaries in the form of pocket booklets as ready beckoners. Posters can also be prepared and displayed on the walls of Gram Panchayat building.
- The Panchayat Raj Institutions have specially empowered people to work as units of self-governance but it has been observed that the level of awareness and exposure among panchayat raj representatives and gram sabha members are very low. It is therefore important to initiate special training packages, awareness campaigns and capacity building programmes.
- Gram Sabhas have been provided supreme position in the new system but people at large are least informed about these provisions. They are still accepting the supremacy of gram panchayat. It is important to make them aware about such provisions. For this purpose public awareness campaigns can be launched through NGOs. Electronic media (Community Television) can also be an effective

medium.

- Panchayat expected has to perform a very specific role to tackle social issue as well. The panchayat through the gram sabha should also take lead to minimise the social evils. Use of liquor and practice of dowry are to be discouraged.
- The study suggests that merely by resorting to amendment in the State Act and specific provisions for new system cannot change the scenario of villages. There is an urgent need to explore effective devices whereby maximum people can be informed, made aware and motivated to come forward for the proper implementation and execution of panchayat raj to achieve the goals of good governance.

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