



Role of Panchayati Raj Institutions in Rural Development - A Case Study of Telangana

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Abstract

Panchayats have been the backbone of the Indian villages since the beginning of the recorded history. Panchayat Raj is a system of governance in which Gram Panchayats are the basic units of administration. Panchayat Raj Institutions (PRIs) have been involved in the programme implementation and they constitute the core of decentralized development of planning and its implementation. Panchayat Raj Institutions aim at translating the Gandhian dream of village self-governance (Gram Swaraj) and to become an effective tool of rural development and reconstruction. Since 1959, almost all rural development departments have been executing their programmes through PRIs. With the implementation of State Acts under the spirit of the 73rd Constitutional Amendment a clear cut role of Panchayat Raj Institutions in rural development has been envisaged. Rural Development is considered as a tool to transform the society as nearly three-fourth of population of our country lives in rural areas. To ensure uniformity in development of rural areas, many development programmes were launched by Government of India such as Community Development Programme, National Extension Service, and Training of Rural Youth for Self-employment, Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act etc. 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act 1992 provides three tier Panchayati Raj Institutions namely Zila Parishads, Block Samitis and Gram Panchayats. PRIs should be given enough discretion making their own policies and programmes for rural development because they are in a better position in perceiving the difficulties of local rural people and there should be a systematic way of utilization of funds marked for the rural developmental activities. Telangana has opted for a strategy of decentralized planning in order to fulfill the dreams and aspirations of the people; there is an imperative need to change the paradigm of the planning process, so as to reflect the felt needs of the people in the policies and programmes.

Keywords: Panchayat Raj Institutions (PRIs), Rural Development, Telangana.

I. Introduction

As Gandhi often pointed out, Indian lives in its villages and unless village life can be revitalized, the nation as a whole can hardly come alive. When India became independent in 1947, perhaps one-third of the villages of India had traditional Panchayats and many of those were in far from flourishing conditions. The then government has made a determined effort to promote the creation of Panchayats to make them effective units of local government. Article 40 of the Constitution of 1950 declared: "The state shall take steps to organize village panchayats and to endow them with such powers and authority as may be necessary to enable them to function as units of self-government." The aim was to foster democratic participation, to involve villagers in the development effort and to ease the administrative burden on the state.

In 1952, during the First Five Year Plan, the Programme of Community Development was started to create among the rural people of Indian an active interest in national schemes of economic planning and social reconstruction. But the government sponsored programme of community Development could not bring the rural people within the orbit of planning and they could not become active and willing participants in plan implementation at the village level. To seek cooperation of the village population, Block Advisory Committees were established. The Block Advisory Committees were later re-designated as the Block Development Committee. But this system could not activate the people very much. It was felt that unless the people were actively associated with the formulation and implementation of the community development programme, it could not be a success and its main objectives could not be fulfilled. Even, Sh Jawaharlal Nehru who was enthusiastic about the programme in the initial years of Community Development observed that the programme has lost its clan, had faded away and become a pale shadow of its framers self.

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Rural Development has been in and out of the notice of political decision makers many times, but again it is in and this time it is expected to be an integrated effort. Rural Development is an elastic concept and everyone interprets it in his own way, but the broad consensus is that more emphasis should be given to those rural development activities, which mainly concern the rural areas. These include agriculture growth, the putting up of an economic and social infrastructure, fair wages as also housing and house-sites for the landless, village planning, public health, education and functional literacy, communication etc.

Rural development is a multi-dimensional process which includes the development of socio-economic conditions of people living in the rural areas, and ensures their participation in the process of development for complete utilization of physical and human resources for better living conditions. It extends the benefits of development to the weaker and poorer sections of rural society. It also enhances both the capacity and capability of administration and socioeconomic development agencies and agricultural marketing units working in the rural areas. Our constitutional makers also saw the rural development as a tool to transform the society as nearly 74 percent of the population lives in rural areas. Many rural development programmes were launched by the central government with a view to ensure uniformity in the development of the rural areas. The central Government did not leave the rural development solely on the states because in that case there could have been regional imbalances in rural development. As one will observe that to secure the states' participation a certain percentage

of funding is required from the states in the implementation of the central schemes. Major portion of funding to these rural development schemes is provided by the central Government.

Rural Development programme aimed at the development of a particular target groups. The programmes were designed in such a way that they cover the programmes concerning a particular group. However, there was a criticism against the programmes that they covered only some sections of the people. The other criticisms were (1) lack of co-ordination among different departments of the government (2) inadequacy of credit (3) lack of staff of its own at the field level. As the programmes could not achieve much, the focus was shifted to the problem of employment. The programmes like crash scheme for Rural Employment and Food for work programme in Fifth Plan and National Rural Employment Programme. Rural Landless Employment Guarantee Programme, Training of Rural Youth for Self-Employment in the Sixth Plan periods were started. The programmes had to face the criticism from both clientele and also the people who had evaluated the programmes on two points.

Thus, different rural development programmes which were formulated to attack the rural poverty could not benefit the economically weaker sections of the society to any appreciable extent as they were inadequately financed and in efficiently coordinated. The integrated approach which was lacking in other rural development programmes could be provided in the Integrated Rural Development Programme. Such was the need for interrogated approach which could be seen in integrated Rural Development Programme.

Rural Development through Panchayat Raj Institutions

Panchayat Raj Institutions are involved actively in fulfilling the most cherished goal of development with social justice bringing the aspirations of the Indian people for their participation in the development process of the country. A clear cut role for Panchayat Raj Institutions in rural development has been envisaged subsequent to the 73rd Constitutional Amendment. Government of India and the state Governments have been increasingly seeking the assistance of Panchayat Raj Institutions in the implementation of various schemes as well as poverty alleviation programmes. Of these the following development programmes of the Government of India and the state governments have invariably sought a meaningful involvement of the Panchayat Raj Institutions. A specific role has been carved out for them in the context of the eleventh schedule and the



Five Year Plans. The following programmes are implemented through the Panchayat Raj Institutions. Sampoorna Gramin Rozgar Yojana (SGRY), Swarnajayanti Gram Swarozgar Yojana (SGSY) Indira Awas Yojana (IAY), Samagra Awas Yojana (SAY), Trial Area Development Programme (TADP), Pradhan Mantri Gramodaya Yojana (PMGY), Antyodaya Anna Yojana (AAY), National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (NREGS) and many others.

Rural Development Schemes' in Telangana State Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA-2009)

The programme was launched on 2nd February 2006. It envisages securing the livelihood of people in rural areas by guaranteeing 100 days of employment in a financial year to rural households. MGNREGA marks a paradigm shift from all earlier and existing wage employment programmes because it is an Act and not just a scheme. It provides legal guarantee to work. MGNREGA provides a powerful, legal entitlement and opportunity to realise the objectives of the 73rd Amendment of the Constitution. The Act formally declares the Panchayats at the three levels as principal authorities for planning and implementation of the Schemes made under this Act and this provision is backed up by substantial guaranteed resources. Panchayats are more than instruments for implementation of the Act; they have an intrinsic value in realising the expected outcome of enhanced livelihood security for the poor. Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) have been entrusted with following roles and responsibilities in the implementation of MGNREGA Gram Panchayat: Receiving applications for registration, Verifying registration applications, Registering households, Issuing Job Cards, Receiving applications for work, Issuing dated receipts for these applications for work, Allotting work within fifteen days of submitting the application or from the date when work is sought in the case of an advance application, whichever is later, irrespective of the implementing agency, Conducting periodical surveys to assess demand for work, Identification and planning of works, developing shelf of projects including determination of the order of their priority.

Mission Kakatiya

A flagship programme of the government aimed at restoring around 46,000 tanks in five years to provide irrigation source to about 25 lakh acres spending Rs 22,000 crore. As of February, 2017, restoration work has been started for nearly 20,000

tanks and works have been completed for about 5,000 tanks. Government of Telangana has sanctioned more than Rs. 4,600 crore for this initiative in 2015-16 and 2016-17 budgets. As part of the Mission, activities like desiltation, repairing damaged sluices and weirs, restoring dilapidated tank bunds, stone revetments and plugging seepages are carried out.

Mission Kakatiya is aimed at improving the ground water table, reducing the power consumption by farm sector, getting higher yields, spurring the growth of livestock and rejuvenating rural economy on a whole. As per the ICRISAT study, application of silt on farm fields resulted in savings ranging from Rs 2,500 to Rs 3,750 on fertilisers and pesticides. And the yield of cotton increased by 1,000 kgs per hectare.

Mission Bhagiratha

Under the Telangana Drinking Water Supply Project, a mammoth 1.30 lakh km stretch of pipelines would be laid to quench the thirst of Telangana towns and villages apart from providing water for the industrial needs. For this project, surface water of perennial rivers and major reservoirs would be utilised as a raw water source. Taken up with an estimated cost of Rs 35,000 crore, Mission Bhagiratha is intended to ensure that no female member of a household would need to walk miles to carry a pot of water. Under the this flagship programme, it is conceived to provide 100 litres per capita per day (LPCD) treated and piped water to every household in rural areas, 135 LPCD in municipalities and 150 LPCD in municipal corporations. This pioneering scheme has been commended by the Government of India for other States to emulate.

Kalyana Lakshmi/ Shaadi Mubarak

To alleviate financial distress of SC/ST and minority families, Government decided to sanction a one-time financial assistance of Rs. 1,00,116 at the time of marriage for brides who are residents of Telangana State. Accordingly, Kalyana Lakshmi and Shaadi Mubaarak Schemes have been introduced with effect from October 2, 2014 for unmarried girls, who have completed 18 years of age at the time of marriage and whose parental income does not exceed Rs. 2 lakh per annum.

Arogya Lakshmi

Telangana government provides one nutritious meal every day to pregnant and lactating women and children below the age of six through Anganwadi centres. The scheme was launched officially on



January 1, 2015 by Honourable Chief Minister Sri K. Chandrashekar Rao.

For the women, 200 ml of milk for 25 days a month and one egg each day will be given with meal. Children, aged between seven months and three years are provided with 16 eggs a month in addition to a 2.5 kg food packet. For children aged between 3 and six years, one egg a day in addition to rice, dal, vegetables and snacks is supplied.

A total 18,96,844 lactating mothers, 5,18,215 infants and 21,58,479 pregnant women were covered under the scheme expending Rs 627.96 crore in the past year. The quantity of food items supplied under the scheme has also been increased across all the categories.

Aasara Pensions

As a part of its welfare measures and social safety net strategy, the Telangana government has introduced the "Aasara" pensions, with a view to ensure secured life with dignity for all the poor. 'Aasara' pension scheme is meant to protect the most vulnerable sections of society in particular the old and infirm, people with HIV-AIDS, widows, incapacitated weavers and toddy tappers, who have lost their means of livelihood with growing age, in order to support their day to day minimum needs required to lead a life of dignity and social security.

The Telangana Government introduced "Aasara" - a new Pension scheme - enhancing the monthly pension from Rs. 200 to Rs. 1000 for the old aged, widows, weavers, toddy tappers and AIDS patients and Rs. 500 to Rs. 1500 for disabled persons.

From 2020-21 the government is providing Aasara pension of Rs. 2,016 to senior citizens, widows, beedi workers, filaria victims, single women, handloom weavers, toddy tappers and AIDS victims, and Rs. 3,016 for disabled pensions.

'Rythu Bandhu' Scheme

To enhance agriculture productivity and income to the farmers besides breaking the vicious cycle of rural indebtedness Agriculture Investment Support Scheme, popularly known as Rythu Bandhu is introduced from the year 2018-19 Kharif season to take care of initial investment needs of every farmer. Investment Support for Agriculture and Horticulture crops is being provided by way of grant of Rs. 5,000 per acre per season for purchase of inputs like Seeds, Fertilizers, Pesticides, Labour and other investments twice a year, for Rabi (Yasangi) and Kharif (Rainy) seasons. This is a first direct farmer investment support scheme in India, where the cash is paid directly.

'Mana ooru - Mana badi'

'Mana ooru - Mana badi' programme aimed at allround development and creation of effective infrastructure in schools across the State by setting up digital classrooms, constructing additional classrooms and taking up repairs to schools to benefit 19.84 lakh children of 26,065 schools in the state of Telangana. The programme launched on 8th March 2022.

Housing for the poor

This hallmark initiative of the Telangana government is intended to provide quality and respectable housing to the poor. The 'housing for the poor' plan provides for two and three storied buildings with the 2 BHK flats in Hyderabad and other urban areas while they are to be built as independent houses in rural areas. A pilot has been taken up at IDH Colony in Bhoidguda, Secunderabad. As many as 396 units - with each comprising of two bedrooms, hall and kitchen - are being constructed in 32 blocks of G+2 on 580 square yards at a cost of Rs 37 crore at 7.9 lakh per each flat.

II. Conclusion

Panchayats are India's ancient autonomous democratic institutions. Description of panchayats is found in the ancient Indian text Rigveda in the form of Sabhas and Samities. Panchayat literally means assembly (yat) of five (panch) wise and respected elders chosen and accepted by the village community. The philosophy of Panchayat Raj is deeply steeped in tradition and culture of rural India. It is by no means a new concept. Panchayat Raj provided a system of self-governance at the village level. Panchayat Raj Institutions is the grass root unit of self-government. It has been declared as the vehicle of socio-economic transformation in rural India. Effective and meaningful functioning of these bodies would depend on active involvement contribution and participation of its citizens, both male and female. The role of such institutions is so vital in the rural development.

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