

**DEMOCRATIC DECENTRALIZATION IN KARNATAKA WITH SPECIAL
REFERENCE PANCHAYAT RAJ INSTITUTIONS**

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ABSTRACT

Panchayat Raj bodies are looked upon as instruments of rural development and change. They seem to be partially fulfilling the objective for which they have been created due to various reasons. It becomes relevant and meaningful to evaluate the working of these institutions to contribute to economic development and social welfare as the core strategy of Panchayat Raj institutions.

Panchayat Raj Institutions reform in Karnataka has focused attention on decentralizing planning, the principles of decentralisation system, improvement of rural development service delivery, financial management, accountability, transparency and strong anti-corruption measures. The government has initiated several measures to optimize the efficiency of service delivery and induct financial discipline. Good Governance enables the emergence of a citizen friendly, citizen responsive administration, and in the process, ensures that public authority is exercised for the common good.

Key Words: Decentraisation, Grama Panchayati, Taluk Panchayat , Zilla Panchayat, Empowerment ,Grama Sabha, Decentralisation Analysis Cell Environmental Guidelines, Ombudsman, Computerised Financial management system.

1. INTRODUCTION

India is a land of villages and her economy is mainly rural. The village is an important unit in the organization of Indian social life. It is natural that, in a land of such overwhelming rural population, the village community should exercise influence upon the social, economic and political life of the country.

Panchayat Raj is not a new concept. Panchayats have been a part of rural cultural heritage of India. From times immemorial, Panchayats have enjoyed the confidence of the people. The system survived in spite of turmoil. Because the village folk were fully confident of their own capabilities of sound thinking and right approach to problems. Panchayat literally means an assembly of five (pancha) wise and respected elders chosen and accepted by the village community. . Panchayats had a wide spectrum of executive, administrative, developmental and judicial. activities

In a democracy, decentralization of economic, political, administrative and financial powers is essential, because a few centers of power cannot realize and fulfill the needs of the vast multitude of people. If India is to develop, the active participation of the people necessary. It

means that people have to share the responsibility to accelerate the process of development. The process of development is itself multi-dimensional as well as multi-directional. It encompasses area development, individual development, as well as collective development. It encompasses economic, social, political, cultural and other related developmental activities. It calls for co-operation, urge for development and collective efforts. Briefly, it crystallizes into sharing of the power by the people.

Mahatma Gandhi was a great genius and a visionary of 20th century who predicted necessity of involvement of the people in every act of the government. He had a clear proposition that people in the village and cities have the capacity to solve their own problems without much complication from the government by its actions. Therefore, he pleaded the strong and vibrant village which are self contained. He also talked of Gram Swaraj and advocated Panchayats. Bapu raised this question before Nehru when the latter approached him for his approval to the new document of the constitution of India. With the effort of Mahatma Gandhi the constitutional experts incorporated Panchayat Raj institution in the Directive Principles of State Policy in the Constitution of India (Article 40) According to this Article “They shall have all the authority and jurisdiction required.... The Panchayata Raj system will be the legislature - judiciary and executive combined to operate.” Here, there is perfect democracy based upon individual freedom.

73 rd and 74th constitution amendments and its objectives.

The decision of the government to strengthen the Panchayat Raj institution is historical and revolutionary step. Now the area and its scope have become wider. The 73rd amendment Act came into force on 24th April 1993. (74th amendment Act came into force on 1st June 1993) It is a revolutionary legislation that gives power to the people . The whole world witnessed a significant development in the realm of the Indian democracy and federal polity when the 73rd and 74th constitution amendments Act 1992 came into force. These two amendments created the three tier Democratic Governments at the Rural and Urban level. These two Amendments brought uniformity at Rural Level and Urban Level.

The main aims of the act are :

- 1) Socio -Economic Upliftment of the Rural Masses
- 2) Empowering the rural people to determine their own destiny.
- 3) Enhancing their capabilities to involve themselves in the process of planning at village level.
- 4) Decentralizing execution of all kinds of development activities with active participation of the people.
- 5) Orientation of the developmental administration towards participation of the people.
It implies that participation at all the stages of the programs viz. Planning ,
formulating, implementation, decision making, sharing the benefits of the
development, monitoring and evaluation.
- 5) Better planning and implementation of rural development programs.

- i. 6) Mobilization of local resources required for rural development programs.
- 7) Empowering the poor people with provision of opportunities to play an effective role in rural development.
- 8) Strengthening the Democratic System at the Grossroot level
- 9) Provide an opportunity to the backward classes ,SC & ST,s in decision making process

Thus, the Panchayat Raj Institutions form the basic Institutions of the democracy where people from village, Block and district could participate. Devolution of power and decentralization of function start from this point. The main objective of enacting of 73rd constitutional amendment act is to improve the participation of the people in the process of their development.

The main features of 73rd amendment Act 1992 are mentioned below:

- 1) Establishing a Grama Sabha in a village or a group of villages.
- 2) Uniformity in three tier system at village, Block and District levels with exemption for intermediate level in the state with population of less than two millions.
- 3) Holding direct elections to all the seats in the Panchayats at the village and intermediate levels.
- 4) Indirect election of the chairpersons at intermediate and apex levels while mode of election for the lowest levels is common in the rest of the state.
- 5) Voting rights to the M.Ps and M.L.As
- 6) Twenty-one years as the minimum age for members as well as the chairmen.
- 7) Reservation on rotational basis for S.Cs and S.Ts in proportion to their population both for the membership and for the chairmanship of panchayats.
- 8) Empowering women with the reservation of not less than one-third of the seats exclusively for them.
- 9) Conducting election for the panchayast periodically for every five year.
- 10) Holding election within a period of six months in case of suspension or dissolution and supervision of any panchayat as in the case of parliament and state assembly.
- 11) Devolution of powers and decentralization of responsibilities under state legislation upon the panchayat for plans leading to economic development and social justice and for the implementation and evaluation of developmental schemes.
- 12) Financial arrangements through tax, grants-in-aid, levy of taxes and fees, etc.
- 13) Oppointing the Finance Commission once in five years to revise the financial position of these institutions and to make suitable recommendations to the state on the distribution of funds among Panchayats.
- 14) Holding of election under the supervision, direction and control of the State Election Commission.
- 15) The 73rd amendment to the constitution provides for constitution of District Planning Committee to prepare a draft plan for the whole District Comprising Panchayats and Municipalities. Although, this provision is in the 74th Amendment Act, the state has agreed to

extend this provision in the 73rd Amendment Act. Hence, it is assumed as part of the 73rd Amendment Act.

Although these provisions will apply to the Union Territories, certain North-Eastern States and areas like Dargeeling will be excluded from its application. A list of 29 Subjects contained in the XI Schedule of the Act is to be entrusted to the Panchayats Raj Institutions. Article 243E, is subjected to the provisions of this constitution. The legislature of a state may, by law, endow the Panchayats with such powers and authority as may be necessary to enable them to function as institutions of self-government and such law may contain provisions for the devolution of powers and responsibilities upon Panchayats at the appropriate level, subject to such conditions as may be specified there in with respect to 1. Agriculture including agricultural extension. 2. Land improvement and soil conservation, 3. Minor irrigation, water management and water shed development. 4. Animal Husbandry, dairying and Poultry. 5. Fisheries. 6. Social forestry and farm forestry. 7. Minor forest produce. 8. Small scale industries, including food processing industries. 9. Khadhi, village industries. 10. Rural housing. 11. Drinking water. 12. Fuel and fodder. 13. Road, culverts, bridges, ferries, waterways and other means of communication. 14. Rural electrification, including distribution of electricity. 15. Non-conventional energy source. 16. Poverty alleviation programs. 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. Markets and fairs. 23. Health and sanitation, including hospitals, primary health centers and dispensaries, 24. Family Welfare. 25. Women and child development. 26. Social Welfare, including welfare of the handicapped mentally retarded. 27. Welfare of the weaker sections and in particular of the scheduled castes and the scheduled Tribes. 28. Public Distribution System. 29. Maintenance of community assets.

Implementation of 73rd Amendment Act

There were impediments to affect the functions of Panchayat Raj Institutions in respect of structural pattern of Panchayats, organic linkages of Panchayats Raj Institutions, Bureaucratic control over powers and functional devolution and financial devolution. Balwanth Rai Mehta's (Appointed on 16th January 1957) recommendations and 73rd Amendment both accept the establishment of three tier system. But Ashok Mehta Committee (Appointed on Dec 1977) preferred a two tier structure, with a Zilla Parishath at the District level and Mandal Panchayat for a group of villages.

Grama Sabha is too small a body to implement the developmental programs. Zilla pachanyat is too far away for active participation of the people and hence intermediate level institution is essential.

Under Article 243 (c) (2) all the seats in panchayat shall be filled by persons chosen by direct election from territorial constituencies in the panchayat area. In Karnataka, the political research studies show that this structure of three tier independent levels of Panchayats in rural areas prevents establishment of an organic linkage from one level to the other. Therefore, likely to lead to contradictions between the three levels. Better to Taluk Panchayats Should be supervisory body and it should consist of all GP President (Ex officio members) Some States had intermediate level Panchayat consisting only of the elected representatives representing that

area in the village as well as district Panchayats. While the chairmen of the panchayats were directly elected in some states, in some other states the chair person of this intermediate panchayat was either elected from among members or nominated by the state Government. There is a controversy as to whether direct election should be held to constitute the intermediate panchayat or whether it should be constituted by nominating the members belonging to Grama Panchayat and Zilla Panchayat or it should be left to the discretion of the state Government will have to be examined. The related issue is whether there should be direct elections at every level or whether it could be restricted to the Grama Panchayat level only. We have the Grama panchayat to elect members who will represent them in the next higher level panchayat. While this may provide an organic linkage between the tiers of the system, but it may not satisfy the democratic norms for decentralization.

Constraints of 73rd constitutional amendment

It is true that 73rd constitutional amendment has given a new phase to the panchayat raj institutions in India. Major constraints of this act are not clearly specifying the powers and functions of panchayat raj Institutions. However, it is left to the state Govt. According to Article 243G of the Indian constitution, "The legislature of a state may, by law, endow the panchayats with such powers and authority as may be necessary to enable them to function as institutions of self-government and such law may contain provisions for the devolution of powers and responsibilities upon Panchayats at the appropriate level, subject to such conditions as may be specified therein, with respect a) to the preparation of the plans for economic development and social justice. b) the implementation schemes for economic development and social justice may be entrusted to them including those in relation to the matter listed in the eleventh schedule.

According to Article 243(G) of the constitution contemplates that Panchayat Raj Institutions should enjoy the administrative and financial functions voluntarily. The fundamental element of allocation of functions means that what can be done at each level of panchayat raj institutions. But all the states have not adhered to the sharing of functions among the three tiers of panchayat raj institutions(PRI's).

Pannchayat Raj Institutions (PRI's) should also work independently in administrative matters. The State Panchayat Acts also extend more administrative functions and overriding powers to the State Govt. i.e. power for inspection, inquiring into their affairs, suspension of panchayat resolutions, desolving the PRI's. The appointment of administrative officers, removal of member from his membership, issuing directions, etc. over the PRI's. Apart from the Secretaries and Executive Officers at all three tiers of PRI's belong to State Govt. and directly controlled, regulated, supervised by the State Govt. These Secretaries and Executive Officers discharge their different functions as per the instructions and directions issued by the State Govt. Only in Rajasthan and Gujarat for the administration of Panchayats, there is provision for Panchayat Service Selection Board for class III and class IV employees .

When there are adequate financial resources, then only Panchayat Raj Institutions perform administrative powers and functions effectively. Though Article 243(G) emphasis the

decentralization of power, It is left to the discretionary powers to the State by using the word “May” i.e. it may or may not give powers to the panchayats.

In Andra Pradesh, Hariyana, Tamilnadu, Himachala pradesh, Gujarat and other States Panchayats receive the financial aids from the state Govt. Effective implementation of socio-economic developmental programs depends upon the financial funds at all level. Gujarat and Karnataka have allocated the considerable fund to the PRI's. In Karnataka each Grama panchayath receives the grants from the State Govt. In order to strengthen the financial position of PRIs, constitution has made provision for setting up the State Finance Commissions.

Provision for Rotation of Reservation and its impact;

The constitution of India has made provision for rotation of reservation for S.C&S.T, other backward classes and Women. This process of rotation and reservation has lead to some complications. According to the cycle of roation, the reserved seats go on changing at periodical intervals and the candidates are competent to the cycling changes of their getting elected will become for the second time in the same constituencies is less. The new members are elected as afresh every time and without any experience. Hence there is a domination of bureaucracy in the decision making process of the panchyat Raj Institution.

Working of Grama Sabha in karnataka

Grama Sabha is the basic and fundamental unit of the Panchayata Raj Institution at the grass root level. The Representatives must be made accountable to the electorate. Karnataka Government is keen on strengthening the Grama Sabha. Thus it becomes an effective forum for participation of the rural people in the planning and effective implementation of the different development programs of the local bodies. In the villages all the voters can take part equally to discuss and approve the functions and assess the activities of the Grama Panchayat. If the participation in the affairs of the State has to be meaningful then only when they meet periodically and matters will be discussed thread bare.

¹ In Karnataka the following subjects are being discussed in the Grama Sabha meeting.

- 1) A report on the activities of the Grama panchayat since the previous Grama Sabha. This should include the action taken on the decisions /recommendations of the previous GramaSabha meetings.
- 2) The details of the taxes collected by the Grama Sabha and the outstanding balances during the last one year. The details of demand, collection and balances of the water rate shall be given separately. The details pertaining to the village in which Grama Sabha is being held should be furinshed separately.
- 3) The village Accountant shall notify the births and the deaths recorded in the village during the last one year and update his records in case some births and deaths have not been registered.
- 4) Discussion on the functioning of the public distribution system in the village and the implementation of the old age pension, pension for the physically handicapped etc.

- 5) Enrolment and attendance of children in the schools and issues concerning the development of the schools.
- 6) Discussion on the functioning of health centres and the veterinary dispensaries and the preventive measures to be taken in respect of common diseases.
- 7) The funds received by the Grama Panchyat under different programmes during the last one year and the expenditure incurred.
- 8) The measures taken and the expenditure incurred by the Grama Panchayat towards the maintenance of water supply schemes.
- 9) Details of the number of the latrines built in the village and the amount of subsidy disbursed.
- 10) Discussion on the functioning of the Anganwadi centres in the village.
- 11) Identification and selection of individuals/families assisted under different schemes.
- 12) Discussion on the schemes or programmes proposed to be taken up by the panchayat during the succeeding year.
- 13) Any other subject suggested by the Grama Panchayat or subjects taken up with the permission of the Chairman of the Grama Sabha.

Recent trends and reforms in Panchayat Raj Institutions of Karnataka

Panchayat Raj Institutions reform in *Karnataka* has focused attention on decentralizing planning, the principles of decentralisation system, improvement of rural development service delivery, financial management, accountability, transparency and strong anti-corruption measures. The government has initiated several measures to optimize the efficiency of service delivery and induct financial discipline. Good Governance enables the emergence of a citizen friendly, citizen responsive administration, and in the process, ensures that public authority is exercised for the common good¹. Citizen's charters are in place in all departments for better transparency and accountability². The initiatives of *Karnataka* in 1987 constituted first generation decentralization reforms, with the central theme being creating and empowering strong district level local bodies. The constitutional amendments of 1992, with its emphasis on reservations for deprived classes of the population in leadership, combined social justice with decentralisation constituted second-generation reforms.

1 Decentralisation Analysis Cell³ at the State level: There are three important tasks vested in decentralisation analysis cell, viz., (1) monitoring the fiscal and service delivery performance of rural local governments; (2) evaluating the performance of the inter-governmental fiscal system; and reporting to government and the public. Inter-governmental fiscal system means the finances of local governments (e.g., taxes, charges, expenditures, budgets) and (3) the finances of the State government that affect the fiscal position of local governments (e.g., grants, shared taxes, payment of entitlements, regulatory policies, etc.).

2 Creation of Grama Panchayat resource cells at the Taluk Level: The resource cells would be supported by experts in the following areas – financial management/accounting, social mobilisation and computers. Where not yet in place, these would be recruited from government or outsourced. Their role would be to assist *Grama Panchayats* on participatory planning and budgeting as per new State guidelines, financial management and providing technical oversight on infrastructure projects. These cells would also assist *Grama Panchayats* in implementing government of India centrally sponsored anti-poverty schemes, State anti-poverty and vulnerable group schemes, and with the management of the environmental framework for *Grama Panchayats*.

3. Service Delivery Monitoring System:

This activity would support the planning unit of district *Panchayats* in administering an annual survey of service delivery standards at the *Grama Panchayat* level. The survey would be done by the *Grama Panchayat* under guidance and supervision from the district and would monitor service delivery issues and outcomes including health profile of the population, HIV incidence, student and teacher attendance, drinking water and sanitation coverage, and others. This survey would also be the instrument to collect baseline data and information for the final impact evaluation. It would include questions intended to measure the level of satisfaction of rural constituents with service delivery by *Panchayats*.

In order to Capacity building of *Panchayat Raj* Institution members give a fresh impetus to the training of members and to fulfill the commitment made by the Chief Minister in his budget speech for 2002, the Abdul Nazir Sab State Institute for Rural Development (ANSSIRD) developed a new interactive training programme transmitted through the Satellite Center located at ANSIRD, *Mysore*.

The training is based on films, local interaction and community mobilisation in phases that cover general issues including the history and structure of *Panchayat Raj*, gram *Sabha*, gram *Panchayat* rules and *Panchayat* budget, accounts and *jamabandhi*, sectoral issues of education, health, nutrition, child care, water, sanitation and common property rights, the *Grama Panchayat*'s role in overall development and local planning, the right to information and the mobilisation of local revenues. Apart from these activities further it would consist of distance and face-to-face learning for *Panchayat* members and staff, and line agency

functionaries at the *Panchayat* level. Topics to be covered would include duties and responsibilities of *Panchayats*, legal matters, financial management, planning, consultative decision-making, education, health, HIV, environment, watershed management, water and sanitation and others.

Proper administrative training given to the elected representatives and official's of the *Panchayat Raj* about the basics of the decentralized governance and development by ANSIRD Mysore, the national institution of rural development, Hyderabad, States Rural Development and non- Governmental organizations are imparting to the *Panchayat Raj* Institution members. Besides this, there was no coordination among the training agencies (non- Governmental organizations and Governmental Training Institute). This adversely affected the orientation courses and led to ineffectiveness.

5 Computerised Financial management system for Grama Panchayats:

These activities would help, implement many of the recommendations of the State Public Financial Accountability Assessment (SFAA), namely by putting in place a new financial management system (accounting, reporting, auditing) for *Grama Panchayats*; this would also include computerisation of all *Grama Panchayats* and development of relevant software, and IT training.

6 Environmental Guidelines for Panchayats:

This activity will consist of the design, implementation and operation of environmental guidelines that include a negative list, screening mechanism, assessment tools, monitoring and evaluation, training and capacity-building plans and selected analytical studies. In addition, this activity would consist of the design and implementation of an environmental framework for the three tiers of rural local governments, environmental audits and district environment profiles to support district planning.

7 Establishment of Ombudsman: Recently Government of *Karnataka* proposes to set-up an ombudsman mechanism at the district level to investigate and enquire into the complaints or grievances in regard to any action involving corruption, mal-administration or irregularities in the administration by *Panchayat Raj* institutions. Ombudsman for the *Panchayat Raj* Institutions shall be headed either by a retired Judge or a person with a respectable standing in the society. The issue regarding who should be the Ombudsman is under examination. In the current year's budget an amount of Rs.4 crores has been earmarked for this purpose.

The *Karnataka* is the first State to make mandatory provisions that a candidate aspiring to contest *Panchayat* elections should have or construct a toilet for his/her own household. In other words, a household toilet became a pre-requisite for any person to contest in the *Grama Panchayat* elections and its absence would be a reason to reject (disqualify) the nomination papers. *Karnataka* State government has taken following steps in order to strengthen *Panchayat Raj* institutions. The details of these 2003 *Panchayat Raj* Institutions amendments are as follows:

- Frequency of *Grama Panchayat* meetings to be increased from once in two months to once a month.
- Greater freedom given to *Panchayat Raj* Institutions to form joint committees among themselves to pursue common objectives.
- *Panchayat Raj* Institution Members to disclose any pecuniary interest that he has in any question coming up for consideration at the concerned *Panchayat Raj* Institution meeting.
- *Taluk Panchayat* and *Zilla Panchayat* members to declare their assets; cessation of membership for filing false or incorrect declaration.
- *Taluk Panchayat* and *Zilla Panchayat* members to maintain election expenses accounts; failure to lodge them to attract disqualification.
- *Panchayat Raj* Institution proceedings to be made public, along with who voted for or against, within 72 hours.
- Quorum for *Panchayat Raj* Institution meetings to be fixed at 50 percent of the total number of members.

Administrative strengthening of Grama Panchayat:

- *Grama Panchayat* Adhyakshas to become Executive Heads of the *Grama Panchayat* as in the case of *Taluk* and *Zilla Panchayats*.
- Power given to *Grama Panchayats* for outsourcing services of technical staff..Pachayat development Officer oppointed in each Grama Panchayat .It is now mandatory for officials to attend *Grama Panchayat* meetings.

Fiscal strengthening of Grama Panchayats:

- **The Minimum Statutory Developmental grant per Grama Panchayat** has been fixed at Rs. 8 lakh.
- **Giving greater flexibility to Panchayat Raj Institutions to plan and prioritise within their spheres:** In parallel with the amendments, two initiatives have been undertaken in order to ensure that *Panchayat Raj* Institutions are effectively enabled to work with greater freedom. These are through coming out with a role mapping matrix for the three *Panchayat Raj* Institution spheres and rationalizing and doing away with redundant and fragmented schemes.
- **Rationalisation of Schemes:** This process of making *Panchayat Raj* Institutions accountable for their specific roles is also tied up with the initiative on rationalization of schemes. The rationalization of schemes has resulted in a reduction in their number operated by the *Panchayat Raj* Institutions, thereby giving them greater flexibility to address their priorities. The details of the rationalization that has been adopted is as follows:

Details of Schemes Adopted for Before and After Rationalization (No. of schemes)

Schemes	Prior to rationalization	After rationalization
Plan	399	221
Non plan	255	114
Total	654	335

Fiscal decentralization.

1. *Grama Panchayat* meeting should be conducted once in a month (now) instead of two months (previously).
2. In order to conduct the *Panchayat Raj* meeting, 50 percent out of the total number of members have to be attended.
3. *Grama Panchayat* has power to get the technical staff services from external sources.
4. Government officials compulsorily attend the meeting of *Grama Panchayats*.
5. Defined the role of three tiers of *Panchayat Raj* system relating to its activity mapping and made necessary legislature and administrative changes to see that what is appropriately done at a particular level is done at that level only. Many small programmes consolidated and simplified.

2. CONCLUSIONS

Panchayat Raj enables elected representatives to control the government and ensures peoples participation in all rural activities. The *Panchayat* has created an environment suitable for people to participate in the natural framework. At least the *Panchayat* elections provide a day on the occasion of elections that fulfills the idea of universal man. On this day, the solidarity of the village strengthens. All people become aware of one another. This has become important when the opportunities for meeting together are becoming less and less *Panchayat* develop political consciousness at the grass root level and foster real democracy in the country.

Introduction of *Panchayat Raj* provides good training programs for the youth, women and others. This enables a greater opportunity to participate in the village programs. There are opportunities to widen their vision with increase in literacy and health programs. It generates new leadership that are relatively at young age, modernistic and pro-social change in outlook.

Panchayat Raj extends the democratic set up at the district, block and village levels. The reservations of seats and authority to various social groups has widened the social base of political decision-making at the decentralised governance level, thus promoting participatory governance.

Panchayat Raj system hands over power and responsibility from the hands of few persons to several in the villages. Every village has now more than one *ex-adhyaksha* and each of them enjoys a share in the community power structure.

Karnataka Panchayat Raj Act provides civil society with adequate opportunities for participation in local governance but, class and gender hierarchies in rural society often prevent the under-privileged from voicing their needs. Building capacity in *ward sabhas*, self-help groups and other community-based organisations would be pre-requisite to ensure that there is effective social audit of local planning and implementation.

Non-governmental organisations and community based organisations can play a role in revitalizing decentralised governments at three levels; motivating people to participate in the decision-making process, providing information to people on various aspects of local government and planning, and providing inputs on attitudinal changes, for example, with regard

to reservations for weaker sections. They can provide inputs to both elected members and the bureaucracy.

Grama panchayats should be encouraged to monitor a set of human development indicators every quarter. These indicators could range from increased school attendance, reduction in dropouts, child nutrition, total ANC, immunization of all children and monitoring unemployment. In *Karnataka*, regions with poor human and economic development indicators have received more resources than developed regions.

The *Panchayat* Raj Institutions in *Karnataka*, have a vital role to play in rural development, as they are the only institutions to facilitate planning, and facilitate the participation of people and the mobilization of resources. The emergence of these institutions has brought governance closer to the people.

True and effective decentralization is an essential requirement for development not only *Karnataka* but also in India. The local committee and individuals could participate and bring local energy, enthusiasm, initiative and resource under ideal conditions to work out local development activities. By developing power, authority, responsibility and resources, the local self Government elections create opportunities for people at the grass-root level to participate in decision-making bodies. Decentralization calls for political, economical, financial and administrative decentralization. By people's involvement in the developmental process, decentralization ensures economy, effectiveness and accountability in the administration of development besides ensuring corruption free, cost effective, speedy, people oriented development. Decentralization of tasks and devolution of power in letter and spirit of democracy is being realised in *Karnataka*,

Karnataka State's present experiment in *Panchayat Raj* institutions has attracted national attention for a variety of reasons. The legislation is progressive, the transfer of authority is unhindered, functional decentralization is well executed and the State bureaucracy is adjusting itself to the *Panchayat Raj* administrative set-up.

After the seventy-third constitutional amendment, *Karnataka* State Government revised the *Panchayat Raj* Institutions Act. In lieu of the two tier structure which had operated in the State had to be replaced by a three tier structure calling for a rearrangement of delegation of powers to different levels. The government decided to enact an altogether fresh piece of legislation. Indeed, *Karnataka* was the first State to do after the seventy-third Amendment.

Panchayat Raj bodies are looked upon as instruments of rural development and change. They seem to be partially fulfilling the objective for which they have been created due to various reasons. It becomes relevant and meaningful to evaluate the working of these institutions to contribute to economic development and social welfare as the core strategy of *Panchayat Raj* institutions.

Panchayat Raj enables elected representatives to control the government and ensures peoples participation in all rural activities. The *Panchayat* has created an environment suitable for people to participate in the natural framework. At least the *Panchayat* elections provide a day on the occasion of elections that fulfills the idea of universal man. On this day, the solidarity of the village strengthens. All people become aware of one another. This has become important

when the opportunities for meeting together are becoming less and less *Panchayat* develop political consciousness at the grass root level and foster real democracy in the country.

Introduction of *Panchayat* Raj provides good training programs for the youth, women and others. This enables a greater opportunity to participate in the village programs. There are opportunities to widen their vision with increase in literacy and health programs. It generates new leadership that are relatively at young age, modernistic and pro-social change in outlook.

Panchayat Raj Institutions develop political consciousness at the grass root level and fosters real democracy in the country. It makes easier people involvement in all the actives of the village. But, lack of political and social activities, awareness among rural mass may be lead to factionalism and disputes. Eternal vigilance is the price of liberty.

Panchayat Raj extends the democratic set up at the district, block and village levels. The reservations of seats and authority to various social groups has widened the social base of political decision-making at the decentralised governance level, thus promoting participatory governance.

Karnataka Panchayat Raj Act provides civil society with adequate opportunities for participation in local governance but, class and gender hierarchies in rural society often prevent the under-privileged from voicing their needs. Building capacity in *ward sabhas*, self-help groups and other community-based organisations would be pre-requisite to ensure that there is effective social audit of local planning and implementation.

The *Panchayat* Raj Institutions in *Karnataka*, have a vital role to play in rural development, as they are the only institutions to facilitate planning, and facilitate the participation of people and the mobilization of resources. The emergence of these institutions has brought governance closer to the people.

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