



Towards The Realization Of Grama Swaraj In India

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ABSTRACT: For the reconstruction of economic, social, political and cultural aspects of our nation the self-reliance of every village is a pre-requisite condition. The father of the nation mahatma Gandhi always insisted the concept of grama swaraj and believed that the soul of our nation lies in the villages. To realise the dreams of mahatma Gandhi and to achieve the concept of grama swaraj, the parliament had enacted the 73rd constitutional amendment in the year 1993 and there by accorded the constitutional status to the concept of 'Grama Swaraj'. Accordingly a Three-Tier-Panchayati Raj was introduced. The institutions of rural local bodies were accorded constitutional status.

Key Words: Significance of 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act – 1992:

The Ranjith Singh Sarkaria Commission recommended uniform legislation for the effective functioning of Panchayati Raj Institutions. In 1988, the Union Government under the leadership of Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi set up a Parliamentary Sub-committee chaired by P.K. Thungon, which recommended the granting of constitutional status to panchayati raj institutions and recognised the Zilla Parishad as the main agency for district – level planning and development. The recommendations were not implemented due to a change in government in 1989. In 1991, the Union Government led by P.V. Narasimha Rao introduced a Bill in the Parliament to grant constitutional status to Panchayati Raj Institutions. The Bill was examined by a Joint Select Committee, which submitted its report in 1992.

The Bill was passed by parliament and approved by a majority of State Legislatures, becoming the Constitution (Seventy – Third Amendment) Act, 1992, which came into force on April 24, 1993. It reinserted Part IX of the Constitution, add the Eleventh Schedule, and provided a constitutional frame work for Panchayati Raj Institutions through Articles 243 to 243 (O).

The 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act of 1992 has the following salient features:

1. The Act defines certain terms such as District, Grama Sabha, Panchayat, and Village.
2. It constituted a Grama Sabha for every village, which acts as the legislative body at the village level.
3. The Act made it obligatory for every state to implement a three – tier Panchayati Raj system, i.e. Panchayats at the Village, Intermediate and District levels.

4. It required every state legislature to make laws for the composition of Panchayats on a uniform basis, specifying direct elections to panchayats based on territorial constituencies. It also provides the right to vote to Panchayat chairpersons and other members, whether directly elected or not?
5. Reservation for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in proportion to their population, and for women not less than one – third of the total seats. The State of Andhra Pradesh has enhanced women's reservation to 50%.
6. It specifies the duration of Panchayats as five years and mandates holding elections before the term expires or, in case dissolution, within six months.
7. It prescribes the eligibility and disqualifications of candidates in local government elections.
8. It provides for the creation of a Finance Commission for local bodies.
9. Auditing of the accounts of panchayats by the state account and audit officers.
10. It provides for a State Election Commission to conduct elections to local bodies.
11. It mandates that Union Territories shall follow the directive of the President of India in constituting or abolishing Panchayats.
12. It mentions certain exemptions for states having administrative councils in scheduled areas.
13. It provides for special tribunals to resolve election disputes.

As many as 29 functional subjects are enumerated in Article 243 G of the Indian Constitution, read with the Eleventh schedule.

From the year 1993 onwards, in India we celebrate 'National Panchayati Raj Day' on April, 24 to remember and recognise the historical significance of the '73rd Constitutional Amendment Act – 1993'. On the occasion of 33rd 'National Panchayati Raj Day' let us examine the changes that have been taken place in 'Panchayat Raj System'.

At present in India, we have as many as 6.5 lakh villages and nearly 64% of total population of our nation lives in villages. Approximately 2.6 lakh gram panchayats are in existence and as per schedule eleven of our constitution agriculture, education, health, drinking water like 29 key aspects were kept under the control of Gram Panchayats. A revolutionary change that has been brought by 73rd amendment is 'Women's Participation' and 'women leadership'. Among 31.5 lakh elected representatives approximately 46% are women. In the year 2024, 40% of panchayats under the leadership of women secured 'National Panchayat Awards' announced by the Central Government.

Limited Attendance to Gram Sabha's : No doubt, there is an increase in women representation at village levels, but in reality the practice of 'Sarpanch Pathi' (the practice of exercising powers by the husband of the women sarpanch or the family members of the women sarpanch) like social draw backs are increasing. In order to achieve all round development of the Grampanchayats, there should be striking balance among three aspects like Duties, Funds and Staff. Many panchayats are facing severe financial constraints. As per the latest reports of 'Department of Panchayati Raj' the own income of panchayats is only 6.31% among total income. In order to estimate the quantum of powers that have been delegated by the States to panchayats, the 'Panchayati Devolution Index' (PDI) was prepared. As per the latest PDI index, at the national level, the delegation of powers increases from 39.9% to 43.9%. In terms of delegation of powers to panchayats Karnataka, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh have occupied highest position. In terms of capacity building State of Telangana is in fore front. This PDI index promotes healthy competition among states. To promote transparency through technology 'Swamitra' scheme was introduced. This 'Swamitra' scheme enables every grama panchayat to give accurate property ownership cards to the owners by using 'Drone Technology', which protects village properties. Through 'Meri panchayat app' (My Panchayat APP) the people of the concerned village could know their panchayat profile, utilization of the funds, developmental activities.

The 'Grama Sabha', a body consists of all adult members of the village panchat is the 'heart of the village'. But, in reality the poor attendance to the meetings of grama sabha is the biggest challenge, which every village panchayat faces. There is an urgent need to brought key measures in order to make

panchayats as 'self – sustained institutions, but not merely to remain as the representatives of state governments. In order to increase the own resources of income to the panchayats, there should be structural reforms in the assessment of property taxes. The community resources like forests, lakes, government lands shall be brought under the control of panchayats. The Union Government's initiative i.e. "VIKASIT PANCHAYATS – VIKASIT BHARAT" [Developed panchayats – Developed India] become a reality, only when all the people shall without any differences participate in the process of development of panchayats. At the same time the state governments shall have the responsibility to take effective measures in letter and spirit towards the realisation of goals of the 73rd constitutional amendment act.

Conclusion: The 'National Panchayati Raj Day', reiterates the role of rural local bodies in strengthening India's administration. It reminds us that the true development begins at the local level, where people actively participate in decision – making. Panchayati Raj Institutions empower rural communities, promote transparency, and ensure inclusive growth. As India progress, strengthening these institutions with better resources, accountability, and participation will be key to achieving sustainable and equitable development. Ultimately, a strong Panchayati Raj system is the foundation of a vibrant and truly democratic nation.

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