

Dynamics of grassroots governance towards responsiveness

Akhilesh Pal

Department of Political Science, University of Allahabad, Uttar Pradesh, India

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 the principle of equitable 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 constitutional Amendment for the establishment of panchayat raj institutions in India in 1992.

Keywords: panchayat raj, responsiveness, gram sabha, gram panchayat, 73rd constitutional amendment, the madhya pradesh panchayat raj amendment 2001

Introduction

The concept of governance is not new and is as old as human civilisation. Governance means the process of decision making and the process by which decisions are implemented or not implemented. 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 (UNESCAP: 2009) ^[31].

The whole idea of good and responsive governance is that of giving, of serving and of doing good of the people, or solving their problems and making their lives more liveable, satisfying and enjoyable (Sisodia: 2012) ^[30]. The essential pre-requisite for quality of governance is that the system should be good and suited to the needs, aspirations, background and ethos of the people concerned and that those selected for operating the system should be endowed with character and competence and remain motivated by the spirit of public service. Governance must be democratic, participatory, transparent and accountable. The issue of governance is more crucial and important from the point of view grassroots democracy since at local level the decisions taken by the elected bodies have direct implications for the life of the major chunk of population of the country.

Governance has eight major characteristics. They are participation, rule of law, transparency, responsiveness, consensus orientedness, equity and inclusiveness, effectiveness and efficiency and accountability. Good governance is an ideal, which is difficult to achieve in its totality. From the Indian point of view after independence efforts have been made to meet the needs and expectations of the people. Special efforts have been made to address the rural multifaceted issues involving massive investment with the results which were not up to the expectations. After decade and a half of decentralised governance with the motive of good governance put forward many achievements and dilemmas. The state assured peoples participation in the local governance institutions with adequate gender, class and caste representation as per the need of the amendment package. Accountable administration and governance at

local level are still issues of serious concern. Despite peoples direct participation, transparency is still under scrutiny but transparency is almost ascertained because of a very informal social structure at local level. Governance at local level is directly responsive to the people as routine functioning of the local institutions is visible and questionable. The effective and efficient governance is a matter of concern due to lack of training and capacity building for the grassroots institutions.

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) ^[14].

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].

It could be argued that after fifteen years of its operation, it would be practical to evaluate all what has been constructed in the preceding analysis. The practicality of evaluation notwithstanding, the purpose for which the insights and process documents would be generated, calls for an early evaluation of the new system. Process documents providing insights on reasons for success and failures in decentralised decision making could identify role of awareness of rights of stakeholders, their notions of participatory decision making, exclusion, development, equity and justice in the decision making process. Governance assures that corruption is minimised and the voices of the most vulnerable in society are heard in decision-making. It is also responsive to the present and future needs of society (Sisodia: 2012) [30].

This study is premised on the assumption that sooner the decentralisation process is documented and aspects of governance are analysed, the better would be for advocacy and action. This will also help in making midcourse corrections in the new system of governance for human development.

The Madhya Pradesh Panchayat Raj (Sanasodhan) Adhiniyam, 2001

The Amendment related to Gram Swaraj is discussed here in detail. Since the study is devoted to understand the Gram Swaraj, it appears appropriate to provide the detailed elaboration of the Amendment package to interpret the prime motive behind extending direct democracy to the grassroots people.

Madhya Pradesh took the lead in implementing the panchayat raj system as envisaged in the 73rd Amendment and was the first state to conduct elections to panchayats in 1994. The state government continuously devolved powers and authority to the panchayat institutions and initiated innovative measures to empower, strengthen and institutionalise the panchayat raj institutions. An analysis of six years of functioning of panchayat raj in the state clearly indicates that despite several attempts by the government, civil society and other concerned actors, the panchayat raj institutions could not truly emerge as people's institutions. Unfortunately, the distortions of the existing political systems at the state and union levels were replicated at the panchayat level and a new class of elite and power centres led by the sarpanch emerged within the panchayat system undermining the spirit of democratic decentralisation at grassroots level. The state government recognised the growing distortions in the panchayat system and they were in the open criticism of the existing the panchayat raj has degenerated into sarpanch raj. A comprehensive process of evaluations and assessment was initiated by the state government to address the deformity in the panchayat system and to look for possible solutions. The new system of Gram Swaraj is a result of this process.

On the 21st January 2001, Madhya Pradesh government

amended the Madhya Pradesh Panchayat Raj Adhiniyam (Act), 1993, to rename it as the Madhya Pradesh Panchayat Raj (Sanshodhan) Adhiniyam 2001. The citation of the amended Act substituted the words 'Panchayat Raj and Gram Swaraj' in place of the words 'Panchayat Raj'. In fact, the new system of governance, Gram Swaraj, enacted by the Madhya Pradesh Panchayat Raj (Sanshodhan) Adhiniyam 2001 and operationised from 26th January 2001, is the most significant change and experiment in the system of governance since the adoption of representative parliamentary democracy in India. The operationisation of Gram Swaraj in Madhya Pradesh will herald the beginning of a new system of governance based on direct democracy instead of indirect representative parliamentary democracy. The experience and operationalisation of Gram Swaraj will also have serious implications for discourses on governance, democracy and modernity.

Gram Swaraj is a new system of self-governance at village level, which moves from indirect to direct democracy. It is based on the premise that in a village people can assemble and sit collectively and therefore representatives to represent the views, aspirations, needs and interests of the people are not required. The new system intends to give power to the people and not to their representatives. To operationalise this system in field, it has been decided that Gram Sabhas shall be strengthened, which under the new structure will exercise all the powers of Gram Panchayats and many more powers will also be devolved to Gram Sabhas. Gram Sabhas will function as decision-making bodies and to discharge their duties and implement decision (Behar & Kumar: 2002) [4].

The study conducted in the Dewas district of Madhya Pradesh. The study as an evaluative study on fact based, descriptive and analytical. A proportionate sampling framework adopted. Dewas district which includes eight blocks. Out of eight blocks three blocks were selected randomly for the purpose of this study. From the selected blocks, 5 Gram Panchayats were chosen for in-depth study. Thus, from three blocks 15 Gram Panchayat were chosen for in-depth study. Thus, in all, from 15 Gram Panchayats of three blocks, 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. The selection of Gram Panchayat was based on random from the list of all the gram panchayats of the selected block.

For the study, both primary and secondary data were collected. Secondary data were 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 issues of awareness and exposure of the respondents towards the indicators of governance. For 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. Besides these, a village schedule and a directional group discussion were also administered to know the profile of the villages and other similar issues.

1. Analysis and interpretation of Panchayat representatives

Responsiveness is the tendency of institutions and process to serve all the possible stakeholders. The activities of the local bodies must meet the felt needs of the people. At no level of government are the expectations about the congruence of government activities and the felt needs of

the community more than what can be found at the level of the grassroots governance, as it is closest to the people. The other component is measurement of performance through which one can ascertain whether public resources have been utilised to derive maximum benefit.

Table 1: Knowledge about Duties and Powers

S. No	Knowledge about duties and powers	General (%)	OBC (%)	SC (%)	ST (%)	Total (%)
1	Full Knowledge	11 (61.1)	28 (77.8)	15 (75.0)	0 (0.0)	54 (72.0)
2	Partial Knowledge	6 (33.3)	4 (11.1)	3 (15.0)	1 (100.0)	14 (18.7)
3	No Knowledge	1 (5.6)	4 (11.1)	2 (10.0)	0 (0.0)	7 (9.3)
	Total	18 (100.0)	36 (100.0)	20 (100.0)	1 (100.0)	75 (100.0)

Source: Primary Data

Table 1 shows that knowledge about duties and powers. 72.0 per cent respondents have full knowledge about duties and powers. 18.7 per cent respondents their knowledge about duties and powers partial. 9.3 per cent respondents no knowledge about duties and powers. Interestingly, the OBC

and SC category respondents are highest in this point of view. Thus, it is clear from the above analysis that the majority of respondents has full knowledge of their duties and powers.

Table 2: Information with Regard to Duties and Powers

S. No.	Information with regard to duties and powers	General (%)	OBC (%)	SC (%)	ST (%)	Total* (%)
1	Regular meetings and information transmitted	17 (94.4)	31 (86.1)	18 (90.0)	1(100.0)	67 (89.3)
2	Implementation of government schemes	16 (88.9)	33 (91.7)	18 (90.0)	1 (100.0)	68 (90.7)
3	Eligible beneficiaries to benefit	16 (88.9)	31 (86.1)	19 (95.0)	1 (100.0)	67 (89.3)
4	Income and expenditure	16 (88.9)	33 (91.7)	19 (95.0)	1 (100.0)	69 (92.0)
5	The overall development of village	16 (88.9)	32 (88.9)	19 (95.0)	1 (100.0)	68 (90.7)

*Multiple Responses

Source: Primary Data

Table 2 elaborates that information with regard to duties and powers. 92.0 per cent respondents are of the view that information about income and expenditure is given. Equal number of respondents (90.7%) feel that information with regard to implementation of government schemes and the overall development of villages. Equal number of

respondents (89.3%) say provided that regular meetings and information transmitted and eligible beneficiaries to benefit. Thus, it is clear from the above analysis that the majority of respondents agree to receive information with regard to duties and powers, which is positive sign for panchayats.

Table 3: Efforts made by Panchayat to Enhance the Facilities and Quality of Education

S. No.	Efforts made by panchayat to enhance the facilities and quality of education	General (%)	OBC (%)	SC (%)	ST (%)	Total (%)
1	Efforts to make villagers aware about education	2 (11.1)	2 (5.6)	4 (20.0)	0 (0.0)	8 (10.7)
2	Inspection of all school activities	4 (22.2)	16 (44.4)	9 (45.0)	0 (0.0)	29 (38.7)
3	Construction of school building	5 (27.8)	7 (19.4)	7 (35.0)	0 (0.0)	19 (25.3)
4	Contact the District Education Office from time to time	2 (11.1)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	2 (2.6)
5	No Efforts	5 (27.8)	11 (30.6)	0 (0.0)	1 (100.0)	17 (22.7)
	Total	18 (100.0)	36 (100.0)	20 (100.0)	1 (100.0)	75 (100.0)

Source: Primary Data

Table 3 shows the efforts made by panchayat to enhance the facilities and quality of education. 38.7 per cent respondents feel that panchayat representatives do inspection of all school activities. 25.3 per cent respondents keep an eye on construction of school building. 10.7 per cent respondents are of the opinion that panchayat representatives make efforts to create awareness among villagers about education. Only 2.6 per cent respondents contact district

education office from time to time. Remaining 22.7 per cent respondents make no efforts. Interestingly, the inspection of all school activity is done to the maximum extent by SC respondents whereas involvement in construction of school building is maximum from general category respondents. Thus, it has clearly emerged out that respondents engage in one or another activity for betterment of education in the village.

Table 4: Works done by Panchayat for Human Development

S. No.	Works done by panchayat	Never	Once or Twice	Regularly	Do not know	Total
1	Inspection of study and teachers in school	11 (14.7)	23 (30.7)	34 (45.3)	7 (9.3)	75 (100.0)
2	Construction/repair of school building	12 (16.0)	23 (30.7)	30 (40.0)	10(13.3)	75 (100.0)
3	Work /Inspection of health works	11 (14.7)	29 (38.7)	26 (34.7)	9 (12.0)	75 (100.0)
4	Family planning camp	13 (17.3)	30 (40.0)	25 (33.3)	7 (9.3)	75 (100.0)
5	Road construction/repair	12 (16.0)	31 (41.3)	25 (33.3)	7 (9.3)	75 (100.0)
6	Sanitation programme	11 (14.7)	31(41.3)	25 (33.3)	8 (10.7)	75 (100.0)
7	Drinking water facilities	9 (12.0)	31 (41.3)	29 (38.7)	6 (8.0)	75 (100.0)

8	Old age pension distribution	13 (17.3)	22 (29.3)	31 (41.3)	9 (12.0)	75 (100.0)
9	Security system	9 (12.0)	26 (34.7)	32 (42.7)	8 (10.7)	75 (100.0)
10	Employment at local level	11 (14.7)	29 (38.7)	26 (34.7)	9 (12.0)	75 (100.0)
11	Information and discuss about MGNREGA	11 (14.7)	27 (36.0)	30 (40.0)	7 (9.3)	75 (100.0)
12	Work under MGNREGA	11 (14.7)	26 (34.7)	30 (40.0)	8 (10.7)	75 (100.0)

Source: Primary Data

Table 4 depicts the works done by panchayat for human development. The responses are categorised in never, once or twice, regularly and do not know. Works done by panchayats on regular basis are inspection of study and teachers in school (45.3%), security system (42.7%), old age pension distribution (41.3%), construction/repair of school building, information and discuss about MGNREGA and work under MGNREGA (40.0%), drinking water facilities (38.7%), work/Inspection of health works and employment at local level (34.7%). Family planning camp, road construction/repair and sanitation programme (33.3%). Works done by panchayats only once or twice are inspection of study and teachers in school, construction/repair of school building (30.7%), work/inspection of health works, employment at local level (38.7%), family planning camp (40.0%), road construction/repair, sanitation programme, drinking water facilities (41.3%), old age pension distribution (29.3%), information and discussion about MGNREGA (36.0%), security system and work under MGNREGA (34.7%). Works never done by panchayats are inspections. It is clear from above analysis that there is a vast catalogue of works carried out by panchayats and panchayats have been doing many works on regular basis in

opinion of sizeable number of respondents. There is also a view point that many of the works have been carried out once or twice. A considerable number is also of the opinion that many of the works have never been done by the panchayats. It suggests that there is a mixed opinion however it is significant to notice that panchayats are engaged in many works at grassroots level.

Responsiveness means institutions and processes try to serve all stakeholders. The majority of the respondents has full knowledge about their duties and powers. The majority of respondents agree to information with regard to duties and powers, which is positive sign for panchayats. Respondents engage in one or another activity for betterment of education in the village. There is a vast catalogue of works carried out by panchayats and panchayats have been doing many works on regular basis in opinion of sizeable number of respondents. There is also a view point that many of the works have been carried out once or twice. A considerable number is also of the opinion that many of the works have never been done by the panchayats. It suggests that there is a mixed opinion, however it is significant to notice that panchayats are engaged in many works at grassroots level.

2. Analysis and Interpretation of Gram Sabha Members

Table 5: Efforts made by Panchayat to Enhance the Facilities and Quality of Education

S. No.	Facilities and quality of education by panchayat	General (%)	OBC (%)	SC (%)	ST (%)	Total (%)
1	Yes	11 (26.2)	18 (21.7)	4 (17.4)	0 (0.0)	33 (22.0)
2	No	10 (23.8)	31 (37.3)	9 (39.1)	1 (50.0)	51 (34.0)
3	Do not know	21 (50.0)	34 (41.0)	10 (43.5)	1 (50.0)	66 (44.0)
	Total	42 (100.0)	83 (100.0)	23 (100.0)	2 (100.0)	150 (100.0)

Source: Primary Data

Table 5 explains that efforts made by panchayat to enhance the facilities and quality of education. Only 22.0 per cent respondents are of the view that efforts made by panchayat to enhance the facilities and quality of education. Thus, it is

very clear from the above analysis that around one fourth of the respondents efforts made by panchayat to enhance the facilities and quality of education, which is indeed not very encouraging to notice.

Table 6: Works done by Panchayat for Human Development

S. No.	Works done by panchayat	Never	Once or Twice	Regularly	Do not know	Total
1	Inspection of study and teachers in school	50 (33.3)	28 (18.7)	22 (14.7)	50 (33.3)	150 (100.0)
2	Construction/ repair of school building	43 (28.7)	23 (15.3)	16 (10.7)	68 (45.3)	150 (100.0)
3	Work /Inspection of health works	64 (42.7)	32 (21.3)	31 (20.7)	23 (15.3)	150 (100.0)
4	Family planning camp	60 (40.0)	23 (15.3)	34 (22.7)	33 (22.0)	150 (100.0)
5	Road construction/repair	71 (47.3)	23 (15.3)	20 (13.3)	36 (24.0)	150 (100.0)
6	Sanitation Programme	76 (50.7)	35 (23.3)	13 (8.7)	26 (17.3)	150 (100.0)
7	Drinking water facilities	22 (14.7)	62 (41.3)	53 (35.3)	13 (8.7)	150 (100.0)
8	Old age pension distribution	25 (16.7)	43 (28.7)	67 (44.7)	15 (10.0)	150 (100.0)
9	Security system	94 (62.7)	13 (8.7)	3 (2.0)	39 (26.7)	150 (100.0)
10	Employment at local level	61 (40.7)	42 (28.0)	21 (14.0)	26 (17.3)	150 (100.0)
11	Information and Discuss about MGNREGA	33 (22.0)	76 (50.7)	18 (12.0)	13 (15.3)	150 (100.0)
12	Work under MGNREGA	26 (17.3)	80 (53.3)	19 (12.7)	25 (16.7)	150 (100.0)

Source: Primary Data

Table 6 depicts the works done by panchayat for human development. The responses are categorised in never, once or twice, regularly and do not know. Works done by panchayats on regular basis are inspection of study and teachers in school (14.7%), construction/repair of school

building (10.7%), work/Inspection of health works (20.7%), family planning camp (22.7%), road construction/repair (13.3%), sanitation programme (8.7%), drinking water facilities (35.3%), old age pension distribution (44.7%), security system (2.0%), employment at local level (14.0%),

Information and discuss about MGNREGA (12.0%), work under MGNREGA (12.7%). works done by panchayats only once or twice are inspection of study and teachers in school (18.7%), construction/repair of school building (15.3%), work/Inspection of health works (21.3%), family planning camp (15.3%), road construction/repair (15.3%), sanitation programme (23.3%), drinking water facilities (41.3%), old age pension distribution (28.7%), security system (8.7%), employment at local level (28.0%), Information and discuss about MGNREGA (50.7%), work under MGNREGA (53.3%), It is clear from above analysis that there is a vast catalogue of works carried out by panchayats and panchayats have been doing many works on regular basis in opinion of sizeable number of respondents. There is also a view point that many of the works have been carried out once or twice. A considerable number is also of the opinion that many of the works have never been done by the panchayats. It suggests that there is a mixed opinion however it is significant to notice that panchayats are engaged in many works at grassroots level.

Conclusion

Responsiveness means institutions and processes try to serve all stakeholders. The majority of the respondents has full knowledge about their duties and powers. The majority of respondents agree to information with regard to duties and powers, which is positive sign for panchayats. Respondents engage in one or another activity for betterment of education in the village. There is a vast catalogue of works carried out by panchayats and panchayats have been doing many works on regular basis in opinion of sizeable number of respondents. There is also a view point that many of the works have been carried out once or twice. A considerable number is also of the opinion that many of the works have never been done by the panchayats. It suggests that there is a mixed opinion, however it is significant to notice that panchayats are engaged in many works at grassroots level.

Around one fourth of the respondents efforts made by panchayat to enhance the facilities and quality of education, which is indeed not very encouraging to notice. There is a vast catalogue of works carried out by panchayats and panchayats have been doing many works on regular basis in opinion of sizeable number of respondents. There is also a view point that many of the works have been carried out once or twice. A considerable number is also of the opinion that many of the works have never been done by the panchayats. It suggests that there is a mixed opinion however it is significant to notice that panchayats are engaged in many works at grassroots level.

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.
- 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.
- It appears that the required number for quorum is very high which needs to be relooked with ground reality.
- 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. 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.
- 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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